

The Nation.

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LETTERS



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

SISTERHOOD IS STILL POWERFUL

Cambridge, Mass.

■ As the great actress Helen Mirren said about why she took the role of detective chief inspector Jane Tennison, "There are very few roles in which women drive the narrative."

Rebecca Solnit's splendid essay on Rachel Carson, Betty Friedan and Jane Jacobs, "Three Who Made a Revolution" [April 3], demonstrates that even when women are central to the narrative they are somehow moved to the margins. As the history of the 1960s is being rewritten, it includes Solnit's observations on the key role of Women Strike for Peace in nuclear politics, the leadership role of women like Ella Baker and Rosa Parks in the civil rights movement, the transformative nature of the women's movement on economics and politics. She rightly states that the dynamics of the 1960s are far more complex than the popular idea of "a revolutionary romp by a bunch of antiwar young men." Part of the problem is that historians and journalists believe that what women do is called culture; what men do is called politics.

One minor quibble: Betty Friedan's systemic analysis was in her chapter on American Freudianism. Regarding women at least, Freud was the bible in postwar America. Because of the Freudian grip, critics who called Rachel Carson a hysteric and a spinster whose unmarried status proved the unreliability of her data went unchallenged. Today we're seeing the same confusion. The Bush Administration promises women of the Middle East political rights while opposing women's rights at home, under the rubric of "family values." The dynamics of the 1960s are still to be uncovered. Keep Rebecca Solnit writing on this subject.

JUDITH NIES

Highland, Ind.

■ Rebecca Solnit's thoughtful essay on Friedan, Carson and Jacobs gave me a desperately needed boost. Having taken many of the formerly radical concepts of these geniuses for granted, those of us watching their reforms fall under siege need to remember Solnit's wise advice that "books can change the world." As urban centers like Chicago revert to segregating rich from poor by destroying low-income housing and importing the worst of the suburbs (cars, asphalt, strip malls); as women's reproductive choices are under attack from the "pro-life" movement; as our children are recruited by the military in high schools while the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps and other nonmilitary service programs' budgets are cut and student loans are decimated; as peace activists like Cindy Sheehan are smeared as traitors while women like Condoleezza Rice and

Hillary Clinton (who have made strides Friedan, Carson and Jacobs could only have dreamed of) waste their power in obsequiousness, we need essays like Solnit's to remind us of how powerful women's work can be.

I was at Common Ground working in New Orleans's Ninth Ward and witnessed not only the kind of young women Solnit referred to but work crews in hazmat suits and respirators, led in many cases by women; cooking and dishwashing being done by men; and an amazing multicultural, multi-age, nonsexist, non-ageist organization. Solnit has inspired me to send Friedan's, Carson's and Jacobs's books to Common Ground's free library.

SUSAN ELEUTERIO

Berkeley, Calif.

■ Rebecca Solnit refers to Women Strike for Peace saying, "In early 1964, they were among the first to oppose the Vietnam War." True, but we started earlier than that. On November 1, 1961, WSP organized what Solnit describes as a nationwide protest against nuclear weapons testing. As one of the women organizing the 1961 action, I clearly recall that one of the points on the leaflet we handed out in front of Berkeley's City Hall was "Bring home the 20,000 U.S. 'advisers' in Vietnam." Many taking our leaflet asked, "Where is Vietnam?"

PAT CODY

LIBERAL ZIONIST? SOFT POST-ZIONIST?

Jerusalem

■ Within twenty-four hours, *The Nation's* reviewer of my book *The Accidental Empire* made me an apologist for "liberal Zionism," while *The New Republic's* reviewer labeled me a "soft" post-Zionist—akin to "soft on Communism" in another time. Beyond playing to type, what the essays shared was unhappiness that I refused to confirm their authors' ideology.

In these pages, Joel Beinin ["When Doves Cry," April 17] lauds the historical evidence I bring on the origins of Israel's settlements in occupied territories, but finds my argument that settlement initially arose from a vacuum of strategy "not persuasive." Yet is Beinin open to the possibility of persuasion? He believes Israel was consistently colonialist, that settlement resulted from unwavering policy and cites selectively from my material to prove the point.

Beinin asks why I take Prime Minister Levi Eshkol at his word that his government "had decided not to decide" on the future of the West Bank. The answer is simple: The record of Cabinet meetings, high-level official memos and testimony by key figures such as Yigal Allon show that the government debated the issue at length and could not reach any conclusion. Officials up to the ministerial level

warned that annexing the West Bank would turn Israel into a binational state, while ruling it without annexation would be colonial.

But indecision worked for the territorial maximalists. They could act, while minimalists could only talk. Moshe Dayan's plan for integrating Israel and the West Bank was rejected by the Cabinet in the autumn of 1968, but he continued working on it—just as he would continue creating the city of Yamit in Sinai after the Cabinet shelved the idea.

To press his point, Beinin gives too little attention to process and change. David Ben-Gurion may have sought to conquer the West Bank in 1948, but in early 1949 he rejected Allon's request to do so. In the summer of 1967, Eshkol dithered about re-establishing the lost kibbutz of Kfar Etzion but did nothing. After the Khartoum summit meeting of Arab leaders, he made up his mind.

Beinin acknowledges that Israeli leaders misread the Khartoum resolution. (I argue that the Arabs also badly miswrote it.) Strangely, he suggests that since the resolution's intent was moderate, it could not have led to an Israeli change of mind. But certainly a misreading can lead to a shift in policy.

Beinin approvingly cites a study stating that "from 1949 to 1967 Israel was caught in the contradiction between the ideals of a liberal state and the realities of a settler-colonial enterprise." I argue that from 1967, Israel was caught in a contradiction between its liberal ideals and an attachment to land both colonial and romantic.

Contradiction is the key. For in writing history, the details must come before the theory, and the details often point to riven institutions, conflicting policies and unintended consequences. Individuals can be a bundle of contradictory impulses, sometimes with tragic results. Israel's settlement project is a case in point.

GERSHOM GORENBERG

BEININ REPLIES

Stanford, Calif.

■ I can't be responsible for what Gadi Taub wrote about Gershom Gorenberg in *The New Republic*. But someone who frames his review with Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun's complaint that the Israeli government has violated the human rights of the settlers doesn't deserve to be taken too seriously. Nonetheless, I extend to Gorenberg my sympathies.

One explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the two reviews is that Gorenberg is himself inconsistent. Taub and I picked up on different aspects of his contradictory text. Gorenberg seems to believe that a paper trail

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EDITORIALS

Spymaster Disaster

In judging George W. Bush's choice to fill the vacancy created at the CIA by the sudden (and unexplained) resignation of its director, Porter Goss, let's start with a basic assumption: In the post-9/11 world, the United States does need solid and smart intelligence. The CIA has a long history of terrible abuses, embarrassing excesses and inexcusable screw-ups—including failure to detect the 9/11 plot, despite having a bead on at least two of the hijackers, and failure to assess Iraq's WMD capabilities accurately. But it would be a mistake to dwell only on the CIA's record and forget to insist that taxpayers—for the \$40 billion or so spent each year on the intelligence agencies—should receive something of value for their money: a CIA that can deliver reliable intelligence without creating more problems than it solves. That description does not fit the agency of late. Under George Tenet it blew the most important intelligence question after September 11—Iraq's WMDs—and it has been collapsing internally in recent years, with experienced officers and new recruits leaving in droves in response to Goss's partisan broom. Some analysts feel it has become tougher for them to do an honest job.

The CIA needs reinvention and a director who can oversee the transformation. But Bush's choice for director, Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden, the former National Security Agency chief, is not the right man for the job of the nation's spymaster. Although he has experience managing a large intelligence bureaucracy, the two main criticisms that emerged immediately after his nomination are on target: While at the NSA, he masterminded Bush's warrantless wiretap program. A year after the program had

begun, Hayden misled Congress by testifying that any domestic surveillance was being carried out under the provisions of FISA (the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which requires probable cause and approval by a special court), even though the Administration had been evading FISA for a year. After this illegal spying was exposed last year, Hayden was one of its most ardent champions, complaining that FISA presented burdensome bureaucratic obstacles. His remarks showed a disregard for due process—after all, after 9/11 Congress did pass a provision that allowed investigators to obtain wiretaps in emergencies as long as they filed the necessary request within seventy-two hours after the tap. That wasn't good enough for Hayden.

The other objection was Hayden's wardrobe: He wears a uniform. For years there has been a fierce battle within the national security establishment, as CIA directors have feuded with defense secretaries—especially Donald Rumsfeld—over control of intelligence resources. This is not just about money. The military has an understandable penchant for the kind of intelligence that's handy in wartime. Civilian intelligence officials have broader horizons, including analysis of long-term geopolitical and social trends. Placing an active-duty officer—who technically answers to Rumsfeld—in charge of a civilian agency is a lousy idea. Citing Hayden's military status, Representative Peter Hoekstra, Republican chair of the House Intelligence Committee, protested, "He's the wrong person, the wrong place, at the wrong time."

There's another reason to oppose Hayden. The nation requires a CIA chief who can be an independent force and an honest broker of intelligence—someone (unlike Tenet or Goss) who will signal from the start that he or she will quit if the policy-makers (including the Commander in Chief) abuse or misrepresent in-

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formation supplied by intelligence professionals. It's sad but true: With the Bush Administration, the CIA chief has to check the President. There's no indication that Hayden can, or will, be such a director. And there's no chance Bush would appoint such a spy chief.

For a Sane Energy Policy

Everyone from Thomas Friedman to George W. Bush talks about America's addiction to oil, but few are doing anything useful about it. Instead, we get Senate majority leader Bill Frist, like a Tammany boss at election time, proposing to hand out \$100 bills to every American and the Democrats pandering back with a call for a sixty-day suspension of the 18.4-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax. We need leaders who understand that this is a systemic crisis that goes to the very roots of the American way of life—big cars, Big Oil, big business and sprawl—and that there can be no solution but a systemic one.

In his energy speech, on April 25, Bush showed he doesn't get it. He offered a four-point program that's a grab bag of measures, such as suspending deposits into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, rescinding tax breaks to oil companies and old faves like opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for drilling (which might produce a year's worth of oil ten years from now) or conjuring up visions of hydrogen fuel cells (which, at the present pace, will be available around 2020).

So far, our leaders are more concerned with dousing a political brush fire than with formulating good national energy policy. To be sure, if gas prices continue to climb, there will be hell to pay for the party in power in November. The mixture of an unpopular war and a direct hit on the wallets of car-dependent Americans is highly volatile.

Politics aside, though, the United States faces urgent energy issues, some of which first came to public notice during the 1973 OPEC embargo in retaliation for US aid to Israel in the Yom Kippur War. That shutoff caused a price spike and long gas lines, followed by another spike in 1979 because of the revolution in Iran. Those crises stimulated a fuel-conservation drive, which while it lasted encouraged architects to design energy-efficient buildings and Detroit to start making more fuel-efficient cars. Cheaper oil reversed that process.

A lot of oil has passed through the pipelines since the 1970s. The emerging problems of those days have become the crises of today. While politicians continue to fiddle, petroleum prices are in a state of permanent ascent because of international competition and the end of easily extracted oil. Moreover, global warming, then a little-understood phenomenon, has become a clear and present danger to the very survival of the planet.

A serious energy policy would mandate an immediate reduction in the substantial US contribution to global warming. Such a policy would ante up real money to accelerate production of alternative fuels like E85 (85 percent gasoline and 15 percent ethanol). It would include much higher fuel-economy standards (CAFE) to prod the car companies to manufacture high-mileage, hybrid and flex-fuel cars and tax refunds to encourage consumers

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to buy them. (Representative Dennis Kucinich's Gas Price Spike Act would use revenues from an excess-profits tax to pay for such incentives and to improve the mass transportation infrastructure.) Gas taxes should be raised to nudge consumers into buying these cars; the proceeds would go to an income support program for working-poor drivers who need their cars to get to jobs and are being hurt most by rising gas prices. Legislators should contrive long-range blueprints—along the lines of the Apollo Alliance's ten-point plan—that would promote renewables, upgrade the energy infrastructure, improve efficiency in the transportation and building industries, finance more clean technology and institute "smart growth" programs for cities and suburbs (see www.apolloalliance.org).

A comprehensive energy policy would also declare energy independence from unstable oil suppliers with autocrats who skim profits while tyrannizing their people. The hypocrisy of our claims to promote democracy is revealed to the world when Dick Cheney chastises Russia for suppressing democracy, then hobnobs with the corrupt rulers of oil-rich Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.

Also on the energy agenda should be laws and antitrust actions against Big Oil's economic tyranny at home. A decade of mergermania has restructured the industry into a few giant cartels that can manipulate supply and demand (for example, by cutting domestic refining capacity to create gasoline shortages). These companies are so powerful, they dictate energy policy to their man in the White House and buy off lawmakers with lavish donations (\$33 million in 2005, according to politicalmoneyline.com). We need public shaming of the oil companies before Congressional committees for their excess profits, fat CEO pay scales and bloated returns on capital. The Justice Department should launch an antitrust inquiry into the oil giants' pricing policies.

The first step toward curing America's addiction to oil is to admit that the problem is much worse than high gas prices. We face a long-term energy and environmental crisis, and to address it we need reality-based leadership that will map a clear route to sustainable energy independence and a nonpolluting future.

COMMENT

The New Kerry

Delivering a major address in April before a portrait of George Washington and busts of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson in Boston's historic Faneuil Hall, John Kerry must have felt as though he was back running for President. But on the thirty-fifth anniversary of his stirring testimony before Congress as a representative of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Kerry was invoking a theme downplayed throughout his 2004 campaign and confronting the issue that bedeviled his candidacy: the war in Iraq.

"As in 1971, this is another moment when American patriotism demands more dissent and less complacency in the face of bland assurances from those in power," Kerry told a crowd of 800 full of fellow vets and Democratic activists. "As in Vietnam, we

have stayed and fought and died even though it is time for us to go." Kerry had recently broken with the Democratic leadership and proposed setting a deadline for Iraqis to form a permanent government and for US troops to leave. According to the *Boston Globe*, the audience was "wildly enthusiastic"—a phrase not often used to describe crowds listening to the junior senator from Massachusetts. Former DNC chair Steve Grossman called the speech "profoundly presidential," which is exactly what Kerry once again wants to be.

In the past few months Kerry has presented a side of himself very different from the one the public saw during the 2004 campaign. Freed from the grip of consultants, the spotlight of the national media and the Republican attack dogs, he is looser, clearer and more compelling. Call it the Al Gore Effect. At the end of a presidential campaign, losing candidates either retreat, keep up the good fight or attempt the arduous task of redefining themselves. Kerry's both fighting and redefining these days.

"The fact of losing so narrowly tends to concentrate the mind," Kerry tells me in an interview in his Senate office. Only a week after the death of his first wife, the mother of their two daughters, Kerry is surprisingly relaxed and upbeat, frank about his past failures and future aspirations. People close to him certainly sense a change in attitude. Former Senator Gary Hart, a confidant, believes Kerry has circled back to the Vietnam era, recognizing the folly of current US policy and rising to protest against it. "He's much more outspoken, much more decisive and much less likely to give credit to this Administration," Hart says.

The notoriously cautious Kerry has gone bold, conveying his views on Iraq and national security through an aggressive schedule of speeches, op-eds and talk-show appearances. Into the void of Democratic Party leadership, he's speaking for the vocal opposition—even endorsing Senator Russ Feingold's resolution to censure President Bush. Kerry's been written off before and is rising from the political graveyard yet again. "What does he have to lose now?" says Kerry biographer Douglas Brinkley. "He might as well go for broke."

That wasn't always Kerry's attitude. Upon returning to the Senate after the 2004 election, he gave Bush some space. Though he blocked drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge with a threatened filibuster, Kerry focused for the most part on noncontroversial issues like children's healthcare and a bill of rights for military families. Over time, he grew more outspoken, renaming the Bush Administration "the Katrina Administration" after the devastation of New Orleans. Soon he was plunging into intraparty squabbles, and he led a failed attempt to filibuster Samuel Alito's Supreme Court nomination.

And after years of vacillation, he has found his voice on Iraq. He's visited the country three times since the election, on each trip growing more dismayed by the lack of progress. After his second visit Kerry gave a major speech at Georgetown University, in October. "It is time for those of us who believe in a better course to say so plainly and unequivocally," he declared. For the first time, Kerry said he'd made a mistake in voting to authorize the war in 2002 and suggested that the bulk of American forces be withdrawn by the end of 2006. On his third trip to the region, this spring, Kerry witnessed a war between insurgents and oc-

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cupiers transforming into a civil conflict, with US troops caught in the middle. Claiming that "Iraqis have only responded to deadlines," Kerry suggested two of them in a *New York Times* op-ed: an immediate withdrawal if Iraqis don't form a government by May 22, or a US exit by the end of this year if they do, in coordination with a Dayton Accords-style international summit. Of all the votes he's cast in the Senate, Kerry told Tim Russert on *Meet the Press*, his Iraq vote is the one he'd most like to take back. As one Kerry adviser wryly put it, "He's got a position now where there's no room for nuance."

Which prompts the question, Why now? Pollster Frank Luntz recently showed a focus group of Democratic primary voters in Iowa and New Hampshire footage of Kerry over the past few months. "Where the hell was *this* John Kerry?" Luntz says the voters asked him. "Why didn't he have this passion, this specificity, when we needed him to?" If Kerry had run in 2004 using his 2006 language, Luntz argues, he might be President now.

Kerry has internalized much of this criticism. "You get kicked on your ass, you get knocked flat, you dust yourself off and say, OK, What did I learn from that?" Kerry tells me. "I think I learned a lot." His endless modifiers have been replaced by short, punchy phrases: "Tell the truth, fire the incompetents, get out of Iraq, have healthcare for all Americans." He shocked Chris Matthews in a recent interview by answering some questions with just a yes or a no. His new mantra, says Kerry, is "clarity and brevity."

But policy and rhetoric only partly explain Kerry's resurgence. His 3 million-plus e-mail list and the \$7.5 million he's given or raised for fellow Democrats since 2004, by far the most of any 2008 contender, solidifies his standing in the party. He even raised \$150,000 for Hillary Clinton at a Boston fundraiser last year. Two top operatives from the DNC are overseeing his PAC, Keeping America's Promise. He's visited twenty-four states and donated to 110 candidates this election cycle alone. KERRY'S CASH MAY BUY '08 LOYALTY reads a recent headline in *Roll Call*.

The presidency is never far from his mind. He freely admits to "thinking hard" about running again. "I have an anger, a level of frustration about the failure of the public sector, that is as burning as when I first got involved in the 1960s," Kerry says. In March he returned to New Hampshire for his first full day of political campaigning, later penning an op-ed defending the state's first-in-

the-nation primary status. In early May he was back in the Hawkeye State, speaking at a local college and fundraising for Iowa Democrats. "That's someone who's *running*," says former Kerry campaign strategist and Clinton press secretary Joe Lockhart.

To bolster his national profile, Kerry is launching a think tank—helmed by Gary Hart—to train the next generation of progressive foreign-policy thinkers; coming out with a book on the environment this fall; and scheduling a full plate of political events before the 2006 midterms.

But Kerry's future cannot be separated from his past. "Democrats have to be willing to give him another hard look," says Grossman. "It's a very, very tough hill to climb." Kerry trails Hillary Clinton 57 to 30 percent among Democrats in a head-to-head matchup, faring worse than his former running mate, John Edwards. He runs no better than 3 percent in online straw polls like MYDD.com. Grassroots Democrats don't want to nominate a previous loser, but if they did, there's always Al Gore. "The first step of Kerry's new campaign," says Brinkley, "is to answer the questions Democrats had about the last one." **ARI BERMAN**

Ari Berman is a Nation contributing writer.

Bolivia Steps on the Gas

Bolivia's natural gas reserves are estimated to be worth about \$100 billion. Still, the nation remains the poorest in South America. Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous president, was elected with record-high support in December precisely because he promised to nationalize Bolivia's natural resources. Ordinarily that means expropriating private property. But in this case, despite the alarms rung by the US press, Morales is demanding something far less radical: He wants oil companies to renegotiate their contracts so Bolivians get a larger share of the profits.

No candidate could have won the election without promising some form of nationalization. Popular protests have led to the ouster of two presidents in the past three years because Bolivia's natural gas industry wasn't doing nearly as much for the country as for the foreign oil companies controlling it. When I traveled to Bolivia this past winter, even energy-industry insiders who'd helped draft the country's privatization plan a decade ago agreed that the deals struck between the oil companies and the government—giving Bolivia only 18 percent of oil and gas profits—were now untenable. "When the law was written, the price of oil was around \$15 a barrel," said Mauricio Gonzalez, president of the national oil company and energy minister under President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who in the 1990s oversaw the industry's privatization. "They focused on generating growth and forgot about redistribution."

Under that 1996 law, urged by the World Bank and IMF, Bolivia sold the bulk of its oil and gas industry to private companies and put production, sales and pricing in their hands. Since then Bolivia's estimated natural gas reserves have certainly grown: Analysts believe the country has ten times as much gas as it once thought—54 trillion cubic feet. World Bank officials now admit

CALVIN TRILLIN

THE GREAT DECIDER

*(A short adaptation of the Buck Ram song
for The Platters sung by George W. Bush)*

Oh yes I'm the great decider (*ooh ooh*).
I'm resolute, and I am strong (*ooh ooh*).
I've said a prayer, so no need to care
If all my decisions are wrong.

"Required reading for our national leaders"*

BEFORE THE NEXT ATTACK

Preserving Civil Liberties in an Age of Terrorism

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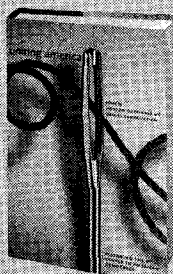


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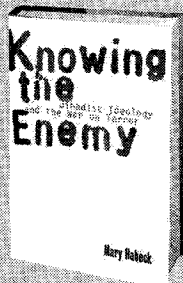
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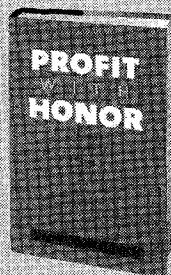


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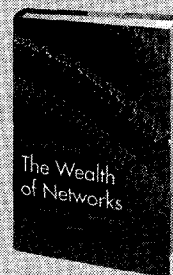


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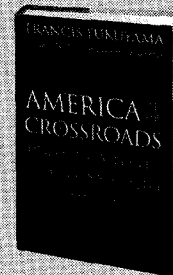
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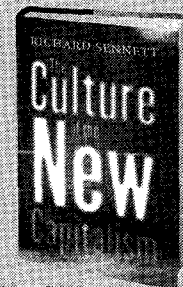
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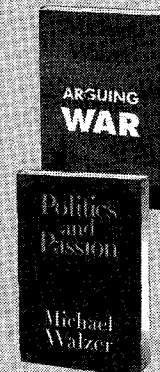
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COMMENT

the low royalty and tax rates have been a bad deal for Bolivia.

Morales was elected in the wake of Bolivians' mounting protests. "Gas is Bolivian!" demonstrators shouted as they massed outside the presidential palace before the ouster of President Carlos Mesa a year ago. "We want to nationalize, to participate in the production train," Oscar Olivera, a leading Bolivian activist, told me when I visited him in Cochabamba. "It's the only way to recuperate the gas for us." So on May 1 Morales announced that the state was retaking Bolivia's gas fields. To underscore his point, he sent troops to guard them, and he immediately hiked taxes on the two biggest fields. "The looting by foreign companies has ended," Morales declared. Companies must sell 51 percent of their holdings to the Bolivian government and renegotiate their contracts within six months.

Morales's move was surely inspired by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who in March announced that he was converting thirty-two private oilfields into joint ventures with the Venezuelan government and doubling the country's take per barrel. But Morales doesn't have the power of Chávez: Bolivia's gas reserves aren't nearly as valuable as Venezuela's oil. How far he'll be able to take his plan remains to be seen. "As always with the complicated gas issue, the devil remains in the details," says Jim Shultz, executive director of the Democracy Center, a Cochabamba-based advocacy group. It's not yet clear whether Morales's move is merely the first step in a restructuring of Bolivia's gas industry or nationalist bluster that won't stand up to hard negotiations with the oil companies. To some extent that will depend on how valuable the companies believe Bolivia's gas really is. If they can still make a profit, they'll stay and negotiate. If it's not worth the cost, they'll leave—and will certainly sue the government in international arbitration for millions in damages.

As negotiations proceed over the next six months, the companies will be using the threat of arbitration as a sword of Damocles hanging over the country. They'll also emphasize that if they leave, Bolivia will have neither the cash nor the expertise to exploit its resources fully. If Morales stands up to them, it may be because he's counting on the continued support of Chávez, his *compañero* and benefactor. The Venezuelan president has increased aid to Bolivia as he moves to consolidate his power in South America and encourage opposition to the United States and its trade agreements. Indeed, just before his May 1 announcement, Morales joined Chávez and Cuban leader Fidel Castro in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, a regional challenge to the US-supported Free Trade Area of the Americas; it would eliminate most tariffs between members, promote investment and advance technical and educational cooperation. Already, Cuba has sent nurses and teachers to Venezuela and Bolivia, and Venezuela is providing its partners oil at reduced prices. The US reaction to Morales's latest move has been decidedly muted—a sign that Washington knows its stock in the region is low and is treading lightly to avoid provoking further hostility.

Will Morales's moves further drive up the price of natural gas on the world market? Maybe. But it's senseless to blame leaders like Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales for turning the high price of oil to the benefit of their own people. Ultimately, it's the shortsightedness of the multilateral banks and private oil companies that's produced growing discontent across Latin America. The region's democratically elected leaders now have little choice but to respond.

DAAPHNE EVIATAR

Daphne Eviatar, who writes frequently about oil and development, last wrote for The Nation about the election of Evo Morales (January 23).

In Fact . . .

'TAINT FUNNY, COLBERT

■ The Bushes were not amused by Stephen Colbert's hilarious, barbed monologue at the White House correspondents' dinner. Neither was the audience. The *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank sniffed that Colbert was "not terribly funny," the standard statement when you politically disapprove of a joke. As Greg Mitchell points out in *Editor & Publisher*, at the 2004 radio and TV correspondents' bash, Bush showed photos of himself searching the Oval Office, commenting: "Those weapons of mass destruction have got to be somewhere." Some of us thought the joke tasteless, but the DC press laughed it up.

TRY HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

■ People in the CIA's clandestine services spy and lie for their country, but there are some ethical people in the agency. Mary McCarthy, for one. She was fired, allegedly, for leaking information about the agency's practice of "extraordinary rendition"—sending prisoners to secret torture sites. And then there's Ray McGovern, the retired twenty-seven-year agency veteran who raked Defense Secretary Rumsfeld with questions like, When

was he lying about Iraq's Al Qaeda ties and WMDs, and when did he know it? Since Bush's choice for CIA director, Gen. Michael Hayden, is tainted (see page 3), we nominate McGovern for the post. As his press officer, how about Mary McCarthy?

LAWRENCE LADER

■ Lawrence Lader, a pioneering crusader for abortion rights, died May 7, aged 86. Lader wrote a hugely influential 1966 book, starkly titled *Abortion*, which was so well researched and argued the Supreme Court cited it in *Roe v. Wade*. In 1976, three years after that decision, he wrote prophetically in this magazine: "The growing denial of abortion rights...has not come from highly publicized Constitutional amendments but from a new and almost unnoticed danger: the refusal of abortion services."

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ Jay Rosen examines efforts to marginalize the news media. Dave Zirin wonders why the press demonizes flawed slugger Barry Bonds as he nears Babe Ruth's home run record but no one remembers The Babe's considerable flaws.

PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Yumi, Yumi, Yumi

The recent demonstrations focusing attention on the problems of immigration and immigrant status could be the entree to one of those longed-for national discussions I always imagine us having in a less-bunkered world. In my utopian dream, we'd be discussing whether the nation-state is anachronistic in an age of borderless global corporate influence. We'd be concerning ourselves with the balance between a nationalistic call for immigrants to assimilate completely and the desire of many refugees to freely express their cultural identity after having fled someplace else on the globe where they were persecuted precisely for that identity. We would be examining the degree of overlap between our guarantees of civil rights and international notions of human rights. We'd ask if it's really a good idea to suspend the protections of workplace and environmental laws—either domestically or abroad, in the guise of Free Trade Zones—with no thought to long-term consequences. And whether we really have the means or desire to deport the 12 million undocumented people currently living within our borders.

So we have important issues to address. Given that full menu, it is somewhat surprising that We the People are apparently obsessed with whether the singing of the national anthem in Spanish is an affront to our Union. Indeed, this has become such a pressing issue that the Senate spent actual taxpayer time to craft and pass a resolution condemning the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner" in any language but English. The matter has gone all the way to top levels of the White House, where President Bush took time from pondering insurrection, economic collapse, terrorism and nuclear threat to opine that "The Star Spangled Banner" just does not have the same "value" when sung in Spanish.

It is an odd stance for a President who, when campaigning for office, sang the national anthem in Spanish wholeheartedly when he visited Latino districts. And it is surely an odd stance for a government whose own websites list translations of the song into many languages—for the protectorates, presumably, rather than for those whose feet actually rest upon the sod of the mainland Homeland.

I confess I don't understand this English-only stance, poll numbers notwithstanding. I appreciate that stasis in language is often a marker of what is holy, revered, ritualized, handed down from generation to generation in exactly the same form in which it was received. But hybridity is inevitable. Even allowing for those who adhere to such a relationship to language when it comes to God—like those who want Aramaic for their Scripture or the King James version for their Bible—as citizens of the United States we are distinguished by our motley, miscegenated populace. From Garrison Keillor to Jimi Hendrix, we are at our best in the creatively profuse expressions of our allegiance to the United States of America.

The structure of an anthem is pretty basic. It is a stylized song in praise of God, country, rivers, seas, the bravery of soldiers, the kindness of rulers and the eternity of one's own form of govern-

ment. There don't seem to be many other rules: Some countries have more than one; some change them like coats according to the season. Across our northern border "O Canada" is sung in French and English. The Swiss national anthem has four official versions, in French, Italian, German and Romansch. There is only one version of the South African national anthem, but it blends two former anthems and has stanzas incorporating five of its eleven official languages. "The Star Spangled Banner" itself has been translated by previous generations—our forebears—into

Latin, German, Yiddish, Acadian, Creole.

Yet as one travels around the world of anthems, the similarities are a tribute not only to nationalism but to a certain universality of spirit—it's much too often a common spirit of nativism. When, for example, Mark Krikorian, director of the conservative Center for Immigration Studies, asserted that a Spanish "Star Spangled Banner" is as unthinkable as "The Marseillaise" being sung in English, all I could think of was the third stanza of "The Marseillaise," which, roughly—if unthinkably—translated, exclaims: "What! These foreign cohorts! They would make laws in our living rooms! Good God! The vile despots would become the masters of our destiny!"

It's intriguing if not always comforting to consider the similarities of sentiment in a time when so much else divides us. If we have fruited plains and purple mountains, Sri Lanka is "laden with corn and luscious fruit"; if o'er the ramparts we watched through the perilous fight, the People's Republic of China was arising to "build our new Great Wall! The people of China have come to a time of greatest peril!"

If our anthem asks whether that banner yet waves o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave, Israel's declares that "hope has not yet been lost, the 2,000-year-old hope, to be a free nation in our own homeland." When the third verse of "The Star Spangled Banner" says, "O, thus be it ever when free men shall stand between their loved homes and the war's desolation," I think of the song written in 1934 as Palestine's national anthem: "We do not want an eternal humiliation, nor a miserable life.... We will re-establish our great glory. My homeland! My homeland!" (That Palestinian anthem, by the way, was adopted by the Provisional Authority as Iraq's new national anthem, in 2003.) The previous Iraqi anthem's chorus was: "A homeland that extended its wings over the horizon and wore the glory of civilization as a garment. Blessed be the land of two rivers, a homeland of glorious determination and tolerance." My favorite national anthem—other than our own noble paeon, of course—is that of Vanuatu, a string of islands in the South Pacific, which reminds its citizens, "We have many traditions and we are finding new ways. Now we shall be one person. We shall be united forever." The title of the anthem is "Yumi, Yumi, Yumi," or you-me, meaning "We, We, We" in Bislama, a lingua franca made from English, French and several indigenous languages.

Yada, yada, yada. Now can't we all play ball? ■

ERIC ALTERMAN

Three Liberal Lives

John Kenneth Galbraith died on April 29 at age 97, ending one of the most consequential liberal lives of the past century. As it happened, his death came just days after those of two other giants of American liberalism: Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg at age 84 and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin at 81. It would take up much of this magazine just to list the scholarly, literary, political, even prophetic achievements of these three, as well as to describe the myriad ways the world is a better place for their having lived in it. Here are just a few highlights.

Hertzberg ran guns to Palestine in 1946, already a rabbi, an aspiring historian and vice president of the Philadelphia Zionist Region. He published an indispensable intellectual history of the Zionist ideal in 1959 and celebrated Israel's victory in 1967 but called for a Palestinian state decades before respectable Jewish opinion allowed such talk. He held fast to this position despite serving not only as the rabbi at important Conservative synagogues but also as president of the American Jewish Congress (1972–78) and vice president of the World Jewish Congress (1975–91). In addition Hertzberg condemned the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Israeli beatings of Palestinians in 1988 and Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes in 2004. He even called on America to deduct from its aid to Israel every nickel the Jewish state devoted to its illegal settlements. Israel aside, Hertzberg was large; he contained multitudes. Imagine a rabbi in Englewood, New Jersey, telling his Conservative congregation in 1967, "A vote for the Republican Party... is a vote for racism, and I forbid it as an immoral act!" Add to this a dozen scholarly books and who knows how many articles and, well... I have to stop.

Like his brother Bonesman George H.W. Bush, Coffin was born fabulously rich and found himself employed post-Yale at the CIA. He joined up, he later said, in an attempt to expiate the guilt he felt over his postwar role, as an Army liaison to the Russian military, in the forced repatriation of Soviet prisoners almost certainly murdered upon their return. This left him, he wrote, "a burden of guilt I am sure to carry the rest of my life." After his brief stint at the CIA, he was inspired in large measure by Reinhold Niebuhr to enter the ministry, and found himself appointed, at 33, Yale's youngest chaplain ever. It was a decidedly stormy tenure. In 1961 he was arrested with six others in Montgomery, Alabama, during a civil rights protest. It was the first of many. He was a founder, in 1965, of Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam but grew frustrated with its ineffectiveness. In 1967 he began to offer the chapel at Yale as a sanctuary for war resisters. During the planning of a demonstration against the Pentagon that year, he helped preside at a Boston service in which he accepted 185 draft cards and 175 classification notices to be turned over to the Justice Department. This led to his conviction for conspiracy to counsel draft evasion (later thrown out on a technicality). At the time, Yale president Kingman Brewster told students and parents, "I disagree with the chaplain's position on draft resistance, and in this instance deplore his style." Coffin



left Yale for New York's Riverside Church—but continued his moral leadership—before departing in the mid-1980s to head SANE/Freeze and help lead the fight for nuclear disarmament. Somewhere in there, he wrote six books and, of course, countless sermons.

Galbraith, the most famous of the three, also worked most closely within the American Establishment. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that this made his views less radical. After being hounded out of the Office of Price Administration by conservatives during World War II—for a job, believe it or not, as an editor of Henry Luce's *Fortune*—Galbraith moved in and out of government. In 1945 he helped write the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (with co-workers W.H. Auden and Nicholas Nabokov). The report concluded that US and British saturation bombing did not significantly disrupt the Nazi economy or break its will, something Galbraith tried to explain to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson as he worked energetically and tirelessly, albeit unsuccessfully, to talk both men out of their faulty assumptions about Vietnam. On the side he served as top speechwriter, Ambassador to India and Harvard professor, and managed to knock out thirty-three books, at least three of which helped redefine the role of economics in American political life.

As the intellectual historian Richard Pells has noted, Galbraith's distinguishing trait, as both a public servant and policy intellectual, was "to combine the roles of insider and nonconformist." This insight could apply to all three of these men, however. Coffin never lost his ties to the Establishment of wealth and power that nurtured him as a young man, and Hertzberg remained ensconced in the bosom of American Jewish officialdom. And yet each managed to retain the ability to speak the most difficult and prophetic truths to America's highest powers.

How?

Where does the courage come from to insist that you are right when all others around you are not merely wrong but wrong in ways that are morally and intellectually indefensible? And how does one retain not only one's sanity but also good humor when doing so?

In his own way, each man spoke to this question, though the answers are necessarily unsatisfying. Asked by a church group why he found himself getting arrested so frequently, Coffin replied, "I can only reassure you that I don't like to go around picking fights. Some fights pick you."

To a question about his troublemaking, Hertzberg once explained, "A rabbi should be where the real issues of society are, not where safe platitudes are to be preached.... You save your soul by saving someone else's body."

And in a moving tribute to his friend and co-conspirator, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. recalled Galbraith observing, "The emancipation of belief is the most formidable of the tasks of reform, the one on which all else depends."

Amen. ■

BOOKS & THE ARTS



ADRIAN BELLESGUARD, 2006

Laughter in the Dark

JOHN BANVILLE

LAST EVENINGS ON EARTH.

By Roberto Bolaño.
Translated by Chris Andrews.
New Directions. 219 pp. \$23.95.

THE SUCCESSOR.

By Ismail Kadare.
Translated from the French by David Bellos.
Arcade. 207 pp. \$24.

Who betide the artist who finds himself at what Lionel Trilling called the “bloody crossroads” where literature and politics meet, for a gallows stands there. Art is notoriously solipsistic, and the greater the artist the deeper will be the self-absorption. Stravinsky, in exile in America, hearing news of the attack on Pearl Harbor and fearing war on the American mainland, cried out, *But where shall I go now to work?* In his heart every true artist knows that what matters most is precisely that: the work. All else is mere prattle. As Kafka remarked, the artist is the man *who has nothing to say*.

Yet what to do when the crossroads is choked with refugees fleeing from tyrants and their death squads? Does not even the

most disengaged of artists have a duty then to speak out? It is the artist, after all, who is supposed to have an inkling of what a character in one of the stories in Roberto Bolaño’s *Last Evenings on Earth* calls “the secret story,” which is

the one we’ll never know, although we’re living it from day to day, thinking we’re alive, thinking we’ve got it all under control and the stuff we overlook doesn’t matter. But every single damn thing matters! Only we don’t realize. We just tell ourselves that art runs on one track and life, our lives, on another, and we don’t realize that’s a lie.

The architect who may or may not have had a bloodstained hand in the death that is at the heart of Ismail Kadare’s *The Successor* speaks in similar tones of having “stifled my own talent” and betrayed his art, using as an excuse “the times we lived in”:

It was our collective alibi, our smoke-screen, our wickedness. There was socialist realism, indisputably; there were laws, actually not so much law as a reign of terror, but in spite of all that, we could have drawn at least a few harmonious lines, even if only haphazardly, as in a

John Banville is the author, most recently, of The Sea, which won last year’s Man Booker Prize.

dream. But our fingers were all thumbs, because our souls were bound.

It is instructive to compare the very different and yet startlingly similar work of these two writers. The Chilean Roberto Bolaño, a supporter of the democratically elected Marxist President Salvador Allende, was arrested and imprisoned after the CIA-inspired coup in which Allende died on September 11, 1973—we easily forget that Chile had its own 9/11—and subsequently went into exile in Mexico, Spain and France. Although he died in 2003 at the tragically early age of 50, Bolaño is regarded as one of the most respected and influential writers of the generation that followed immediately after the great wave of Latin Americans such as García Márquez, Vargas Llosa and Fuentes, whose work Bolaño held in some contempt—magic realism, he declared, “stinks.”

Ismail Kadare was born in Gjirokastër, near the Albanian border with Greece, and grew up on the same street, the wonderfully named Street of Madmen, where Enver Hoxha, the Albanian dictator, had spent his childhood a generation before. The Kadare elders were grantees in the Communist Party, and young Ismail was nurtured in privilege. After studying at Tirana University he went on to the exclusive Gorky Institute in Moscow. Although a number of his books were suppressed by the regime, and he eventually went into exile in France, the Man Booker International Prize that he won last year upon the publication of his most recent novel, *The Successor*, revived some mutters of disapproval, with one critic even accusing him of having been a police spy.

In his acceptance speech Kadare told of what it is like to be a writer in a totalitarian society. “We propped each other up,” he said, “as we tried to write literature as if that regime did not exist. Now and again, we pulled it off. At other times we didn’t. The idea that we could create a few mouthfuls of spiritual nourishment for our imprisoned nation filled us with joy.” But the main characteristic of his writing is not joy but a kind of numbed yet comic desperation. The laughter that rises from the dimmest depths of his work is similar to that which sounds throughout Roberto Bolaño’s fiction. It is the laughter of someone who is not sardonic, exactly, not entirely cynical, not despairing, but close to the end of his emotional and artistic tether. Both writers are echoing Shakespeare’s heartfelt question in the sonnets, “How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea, / Whose action is no stronger than a flower?”

Bolaño is not a natural writer—he was born dyslexic—and the surface of his work, in translation at least, has a scratchily rebarbative quality that makes it at once funny and vaguely, pervasively, frightening. Although his novels, and the stories in *Last Evenings on Earth*, teem with incident, somehow nothing much seems to happen in them—no magic-realist revenants or clouds of butterflies here—or perhaps it is that what happens is not really the point, that the point is elsewhere, in the violence and sorrow of Latin America’s recent past. Bolaño’s narrators, called variously “B” or “Arturo Belano,” if they are named at all, chafe at the defeats they have suffered and the exile into which they have been forced, yet they sound not so much angry as impatient, rueful, at times even indifferent. The past with all its horrors has become blurred for them, possibly by their own intention; in one of *Last Evenings*’s stories, the muted yet curiously affecting “Anne Moore’s Life,” the narrator, recalling a passage in his dealings with the eponymous Anne, whose sometime lover he was, remarks irritably, “I was too busy working and dealing with my own problems to do anything about Anne Moore. I think I even got married.”

Last Evenings is the third of Bolaño’s books to be translated—the admirable New Directions is planning to bring out seven more, and Farrar, Straus & Giroux will soon be publishing translations of his major novels, *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*—and is probably as good a place as any for a new reader to begin. The novels *By Night in Chile*, a deathbed confession by a priest-cum-literary critic who is a cross between one of Graham Greene’s whiskey priests and Beckett’s dying Malone, and *Distant Star*, centering on Carlos Wieder, poet, aviator and one of Pinochet’s secret assassins, are suffused with a sense of heaving, perspiring discomfort. *By Night in Chile*’s Father Urrutia, squirming on his deathbed in the toils of his own bad faith and overburdened conscience, is a representative Bolaño figure, the counterpart to the equally uncomfortable narrators of the stories who are in their own way as tormented by the past as is the dying priest.

In *Last Evenings* the emblematic character is Henri Simon Leprince, a failed writer in wartime Paris who joins the Resistance not out of patriotic zeal or anti-fascist conviction but because he “happened to choose the right side, as unconsciously as bacteria infect a host.” Leprince, “modest and repellent,” whom everyone despises yet whom everyone mysteriously needs, embodies all of Bolaño’s ambiguous at-

titudes toward the artist, that quintessence of opportunism, secretiveness, sad yearning and *mauvaise foi*.

Kadare’s laughter too is dark but not quite so bitter as Bolaño’s. In his novel *The File on H.*, two Irish-American scholars arrive in Albania in the 1930s to study the still-surviving oral epic poetry tradition, which they are convinced goes all the way back to Homer. Since their only encounter with the Albanian language has been through the epics, their conversation is hilariously antiquated: “Fair lady, to thee I bow, thy servant Bill Norton.” This is splendid knockabout stuff, as is the portrait of the small-town society of petty government officials and their frisky wives, and the squadron of dimwitted spies who burrow like termites through the body politic. Albanian readers in the early 1980s, when the book was published, would have had no trouble translating the prewar setting to their own time.

The Successor, Kadare’s latest novel—translated by David Bellos into English from the French translation by Tedi Papavrami—deals with the death on the night of December 13, 1981, of Mehmet Shehu, the man who had been expected to succeed Enver Hoxha, known as the Guide, as Albania’s leader. Was the Successor murdered, or did he shoot himself? And why, in either case? The book, then, is a sort of existential whodunit, a cross between Dostoyevsky and Georges Simenon at his most bleakly enigmatic. If a murder was committed, there are plenty of suspects: Adrian Hasobeu, Shehu’s chief rival; the architect who renovated the Guide’s family home and knew of a secret passage; even the Guide himself, ever jealous of his position and gnawing constantly on his suspicions of those around him. The tone of the novel is by turns lofty in a faintly dingy sort of way—“I was convinced I was putting up a temple that would be crowned by mourning”—and cruelly comic, as in this passage when the Successor’s daughter has just finished making love with her fiancé:

Still panting for breath, she covered him in kisses and smothered him in endearments. “Shall we do it again? We’ll do it again in the evening, in the afternoon, at dawn, won’t we?” “Absolutely,” he said, as he fumbled around for a cigarette.

The work of Kadare and Bolaño merge in that gesture, that indifferent fumbling for another cigarette, as the world itself goes up in smoke. ■

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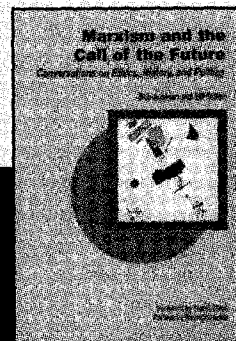
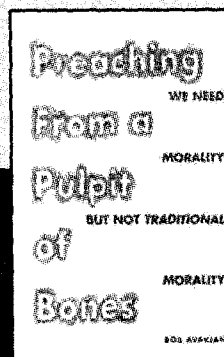
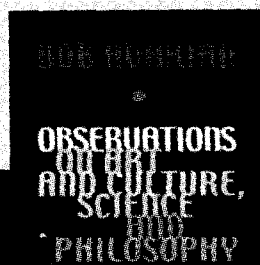
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Dead Man

WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ

EVERYMAN. By Philip Roth. Houghton Mifflin. 182 pp. \$24.

In the medieval morality play *Everyman*, the eponymous hero is summoned by Death to give a final account of his life in this world. Everyman, immersed in sin, pleads, bargains, weeps, seeks fruitlessly for help and, finally, repents; as his body sinks to the grave, his soul rises to heaven. In Philip Roth's novel

Everyman, the anonymous hero also faces death, also looks back on a life of error, also finds himself bereft before the grave. But here there is no repentance, no soul and no heaven: "Religion was a lie that he had recognized early in life.... There was only our bodies, born to live and die on terms decided by the bodies that had lived and died before us." In the end, instead of angels, there are only doctors; instead of salvation, extinction.

Everyman belongs to a minor strain in Roth's work—along with *The Breast* (1972), *Deception* (1990) and *The Dying Animal* (2001), it is the fourth in a series of novellas that have punctuated his steady production of ambitious novels over the past several decades. The four bear a family resemblance that goes beyond their length (and that distinguishes them from *Goodbye, Columbus*, the 1959 novella that inaugurated Roth's career). Each presents a narrowly focused fictional world largely stripped of social context: a few characters, a couple of settings, a minimum of descriptive elaboration. The aesthetic means are similarly restricted: *Deception* is told entirely through dialogue; *The Breast* takes place in the mind of a man trapped inside the gland into which his body has been transformed. These are not short novels, fictions in which the novel's imaginative expansiveness has been placed in the service of a relatively limited subject, but something else, narratives that possess a deliberate spareness and self-conscious artificiality that are akin to those of a laboratory experiment.

The reason for these austerities lies in the thematic horizon the four also share. These are narratives that know only two realities: desire and death. Which means, in fact, that they know only one reality, the body, stretched tight between the twin poles of its fate. "There was only our bodies, born to live and die on terms decided by the

bodies that had lived and died before us." Our bodies drive us to betray others, and then our bodies betray us. They bring us ecstasy and then they bring us death, and in these works the two are always tightly intertwined. In *The Dying Animal*, whose title could serve for the whole series, the protagonist's young lover goes from having beautiful breasts to having breast cancer. In *The Breast*, the protagonist's body is itself destroyed in becoming the object it craves. In *Everyman*, a hernia to the left of the groin and a burst appendix to the right are shots across the bow that prefigure a long siege of ruined virility.

In fact, we're told, if the protagonist of *Everyman* had written an autobiography, he would have called it *The Life and Death of a Male Body*, and the title is clearly offered as an alternative one for the novella itself. The adjective here is key. Masculinity has long been a central issue for Roth: what it means to be a man, how one becomes a man, how one retains one's masculine potency. It is not surprising, then, that health in his work is virtually synonymous with sexual health, losing one with losing the other. The protagonists of his recent postwar trilogy—*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*—are all physically powerful men, athletes or fighters or both, manly heroes in the American mold, their virility thrown into relief by the admiring gaze of Roth's narrative alter ego, Nathan Zuckerman, who has been rendered impotent, he tells us near the trilogy's start, by prostate surgery. One of the chief tragedies in Roth's last novel, *The Plot Against America*, is the loss of the ability of Newark's Jewish fathers to fulfill their masculine duty to protect their children from the world's assaults.

Nowhere in Roth is the equation of health and virility more explicit than in *Everyman*. After quintuple bypass surgery, the protagonist's health is restored through the carnal vitality of his nurse. A nubile jogger's erotic interest gives him, at around age 70, a final, fleeting moment of rejuvenation.

There is the hernia, and the appendix. But the equation is more far-reaching than that. If health implies sexual potency, potency implies a quality—at once physical and psychological—that stands at the center of the Rothian man's relationship to the world, a quality that *Everyman* calls "confidence" or "force." Life, for Roth, is a fight, a contest, something that demands unwavering energy, resolve, fortitude, even aggression—hence those boxing, brawling, footballing heroes. Lose the starch in your soul, the starch in your pants, as the protagonist of *Everyman* does through a long series of medical complications, and you're already as good as dead.

Roth's novellas have something else in common, which is that they are not among his best works. It is tempting to say that in stripping life down to its elemental components of desire and death, they give us a kind of concentrated essence of his full-length works. In fact, it is precisely what they strip away that gives his major novels their substance and value: the social world itself, in all its history and density and detail and, above all, its agonizing conflict between impulse and responsibility. If desire faces off against death in the novellas, as it does for every animal, it faces off in the novels against duty, that very human construct. Roth, whatever is sometimes said of him, is not a cheerleader for sexual license. Indeed, it is precisely his recognition of the claims of responsibility that gives his novels their dramatic tension, the struggle of id and superego that produces alike the comedy of *Portnoy's Complaint* and the tragedy of the postwar trilogy. The Rothian corpus itself, in its painstaking sifting of moral questions, its untiring effort to discover the truth, is an act of profound responsibility. So is the Rothian style, with its orderly sentences and sober diction (from which the odd obscenity only occasionally screams out, rebellious). Roth never says that the claims of desire are just, only that they are inescapable. But in the novellas, with their different emphasis, the countervailing claims of duty are either absent or quickly overwhelmed, and the sex itself can seem morally weightless.

This is less true in *Everyman* than in the other novellas, and while the new book may not be one of Roth's better works, it is by no means a bad one. It suffers most from its use of a third-person narrator, a technique Roth has scarcely employed in decades. There is no Zuckerman here, no David Kepesh, no "Philip" or "Philip Roth." The idea, presumably, was to endow the story with the kind of universality that its

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title demands and that too individualized a narrative voice would have disrupted. What we're left with, however, is no voice at all, or a voice so bland that it doesn't register as one. But voice is everything in Roth (one of his most Jewish characteristics): a voice that rants and rationalizes and ridicules and turns back and around and in on itself. Not for nothing does Lonoff, Zuckerman's mentor in *The Ghost Writer*, praise the young man for having a voice "that begins at around the back of the knees and reaches well above the head." Absent such a voice, *Everyman* is drained of Roth's characteristic energy and immediacy.

But the novella does have one great strength. It is the brutal directness with which it faces the way we die now, with its long ordeal of illness and treatment and illness resumed: the medicalization of existence; the alienation from the body; the mechanization of the body through the apparatuses of enfeeblement—stents, braces, wheelchairs, implanted defibrillators (a word that, the first time the protagonist hears it, sounds like "something to do with the gear system of a bicycle"). Doctors, supposed figures of redemption, come to seem like agents of an obscure malevolence, their masked forms reminding the protagonist of terrorists. Finally, in the long spiral of senescence, comes the terminal hopelessness, the sheer waiting to die. What has gone, meanwhile, is all sense of connection, not just to others but to life itself. "One once assertively in the middle of everything...was now in the middle of nothing." The medieval Everyman, on his way to the grave, loses his friends, his kin, his five senses, loses knowledge and beauty and strength and discretion, and so does the modern one. Nor is he alone. Along with the protagonist's decline, Roth gives us those of his mother, his father, his second wife, three of his former office-mates, his friend from the retirement community and her husband. Cancer, heart disease, stroke, spinal degeneration, suicidal depression. "Old age isn't a battle," the protagonist thinks, "old age is a massacre."

Like his medieval predecessor, Roth's everyman has lived a sinful life. He walked out on a disastrous first marriage, leaving two embittered sons behind; then, at age 50, on a second, loving one, to a mature and generous woman, for a fling with a weak, vain beauty half his age (anal sex, expensive jewelry, Paris), justifying his "crime" (as he himself calls it) in the stupidest possible way—by making her wife No. 3. Later, as his body begins to fail, he destroys his oldest and most sustaining re-

lationship, with a strong, kind older brother, out of helpless envy for the latter's continued good health. By the end, after the inevitable third divorce, he is left with only Nancy, the daughter of his second marriage, and then, after her mother suffers a stroke and can no longer live alone, not even with Nancy. His working life, as an advertising executive, was beyond reproach, but his retirement from Manhattan to the Jersey shore leads him into a desert bereft of companionship or meaning. The point of all this, however—lest we begin to think ourselves superior to this egotist, this tail-chaser, this failed father and husband—is not that he's a particularly bad man, but that he's a man. In the eternal Rothian struggle between desire and duty, we all fail. That's why the book is called *Everyman*. It is not about everyone who sins, it's about everyone, who sins.

Still, despite the announced universality of its title, there is a historical dimension to the story *Everyman* lays out, and it is the same history Roth has been pursuing across his last four novels. Like the protagonists of the trilogy and *The Plot Against America*, the central figure here grows up during the 1930s and '40s with hard-working parents in urban North Jersey in what is still essentially an immigrant community. These fathers do not chase tail or walk out on their marriages. Their sense of masculinity stems not from sexual prowess but from their success in deserving the adjective that is the father of *Everyman*'s protagonist's highest term of praise: "reliable." Are these better men than their sons? No. Their lives are simply bounded by a different set of norms and expectations. In fact, the tragedy of their sons is that their very different lives—postwar, fully American lives—have neither bounds nor norms nor expectations. You can blame the 1960s, but you'd also have to blame the '90s, and the '50s, and the '70s and '80s, and maybe even the late '40s. All that had once supported responsibility in its battle against selfishness is now gone, leaving us alone against our impulses.

To the tendency to idealize our fathers or grandfathers, a tendency that *Everyman*'s protagonist also shares, Roth replies through the mouth of Murray Ringold in *I Married a Communist*—b. 1907, veteran of the Battle of the Bulge, wise teacher, courageous union leader, apparent moral exemplar if ever there was one. The last delusion to go, Murray says, is "the myth of your own goodness." When Roth appears to be railing against sexual constraint, as he seems to do most obviously in *The Human Stain*, he is actually railing against hypocrisy, against the aggrieved self-

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righteousness that *I Married a Communist* calls “moral ambition,” and that is embodied in that novel by McCarthyism, in *The Plot Against America* by nativism, in *American Pastoral* by the New Left, in *The Human Stain* by the impeach-Clinton crowd on the national level and the PC police on the local one, and in *Everyman* by the protagonist’s two sons, hugging their psychic injuries for dear life, refusing to forgive their father for the sin of being human.

The medieval Everyman could look forward to heaven as the reward for true repentance. Here, for the protagonist, whose father was a jeweler, regret, the secular version of repentance, leads to a secular

version of heaven, a vision of “the perfect, priceless planet itself...his home, the billion-, the trillion-, the quadrillion-carat planet Earth!” But this moment of what we might call the astronomical sublime, which recalls Zuckerman’s vision of the stars at the end of *I Married a Communist*, is quickly undercut by a final reassertion of both the certainty and the nothingness of death. The secular version of the afterlife is the grave. Unlike its medieval model, *Everyman* offers no comfort for the moment when Death comes to call. But it is not the job of the truth to make us feel good. It is the job of the truth to be true, and it is our job to deal with it. ■

to provide her with a steady income in addition to what her husband made as a banker. She had been born in Kiev; her father was a wealthy businessman, and like many prominent Russian-Jewish families, hers had made the transition to French life seamlessly. Her French was perfect before she ever saw Paris. She was steeped in the rich Russian literary tradition, and even the discipline of the Russian novelists became hers. For each of her own stories, she wrote pages about the characters in detailed notebooks before she knew them well enough to start her novel.

Némirovsky’s mother was a cruel narcissist, and troubled parent-child relations dominate many of her books, such as her much-admired novella *The Ball*, about a badly mistreated daughter who takes revenge on her social-climbing parents by throwing all of their invitations to a party into the Seine. Her most successful novel, *David Golder*, also revolves around the troubled-family theme, in this case with the child in the cruel role: David Golder is a ruthless Jewish financier unable to please his heartless socialite daughter. That book became a well-known film in the 1930s, but it also made Némirovsky the darling of the anti-Semitic right, who celebrated her portrait of a Jewish profiteer and lauded her for her “pure” prose style (this detail, gleaned from an admiring review by the virulently anti-Semitic writer Robert Brasillach, is cut from the English-language version of Anissimov’s original French preface). Némirovsky seems to have traveled in the wrong circles, all of her own volition: Among her closest friends were right-wing Frenchmen who became notorious Nazi collaborators and champions of Vichy France.

History caught up with her. The defeat of France in 1940, the German occupation and the anti-Semitic legislation of Vichy made a mockery of Némirovsky’s happy assimilation and literary success. It didn’t matter who her friends were; they couldn’t or wouldn’t save her. Vichy legislation “Aryanized” publishing houses and prevented her from publishing new work or receiving royalties—the editorial correspondence reproduced at the back of *Suite Française* shows the arrangements she had to make from the countryside to get her royalties sent to a friend who could be trusted to transfer them to her. Meanwhile, she made choices that look to us today—easy for us to say—like acts of denial or delusion. She had the chance to leave for Switzerland, where she would have been safe from persecution. She didn’t take it. Nor did she flee to the nonoccupied zone, as did so

Love in the Ruins

ALICE KAPLAN

SUITE FRANÇAISE: A Novel.

By Irène Némirovsky. Translated by Sandra Smith. Knopf. 395 pp. \$25.

In July 1942 a writer named Irène Némirovsky, a Russian-Jewish émigré living in the countryside of Burgundy, was arrested by French police and deported to Auschwitz. She died of typhus within a month. Her husband, Michel Epstein, was deported to Auschwitz four months later, and probably

gassed. Only their two daughters survived the war, moving from one hiding place to another. One of those daughters, Denise Epstein, carried her mother’s last manuscript with her throughout the war and into her own adulthood. When she finally decided to transcribe the pages, she was astonished: She and her sister had always assumed they were notes or fragments of a novel. What she learned after months and months of work with the cramped handwriting—Némirovsky’s response to wartime paper shortages—was that *Suite Française*, the title her mother had given to her novel-in-progress, could stand alone as a finished work, a brilliant portrait of French society in 1940. The book was published in 2004 and became an international sensation. Sandra Smith’s sure-footed English translation has recently appeared in a volume that, like the original French edition, includes the fiction plus a “true story” chaser—the author’s diary notes from 1941 and 1942, related correspondence and an afterword by Myriam Anissimov.

Survivor stories are always compelling,

and Némirovsky’s *Suite Française* is no exception, though the survivor here is the manuscript—not the author. It rivals the story of Anne Frank’s diary, or the story of Albert Camus’s novel *The First Man*, found in the wreck of the car where he died. The editorial apparatus of both the French and American editions insists that we read *Suite Française* through the lens of Némirovsky’s found manuscript and the tragedy of the Holocaust. It’s impossible not to think of the miracle of Némirovsky’s surviving last words when you’re reading, and this context gives the book an importance, a shimmering sense of surplus value. As for the author, she turns out to have had a morally complicated history only hinted at in the supplementary material to *Suite Française*.

In 1939 Irène Némirovsky was a successful novelist and socialite, living an affluent life in Paris with her banker husband, Epstein. She had just converted from Judaism to Catholicism. It’s hard to know whether she converted in order to obtain French citizenship or out of a deeply held faith—possibly for both reasons. Despite her connections and literary prestige, French citizenship was denied to her.

At age 36 Némirovsky had already published twelve books, which earned enough

Alice Kaplan teaches French literature at Duke University. She is the author of, among other books, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach*.

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many—for example, Nathalie Sarraute, a Russian-Jewish writer of Némirovsky's generation. Némirovsky retreated from Paris to Issy-l'Évêque, in the occupied zone, where she and her family were required to wear the yellow star. And during this time, she published short stories under various pseudonyms in *Gringoire*, one of the most violently anti-Semitic newspapers of the occupation era. That the editor of the paper was loyal to her may say something good about him; that Némirovsky was willing to be published in its pages is troubling.

Némirovsky was arrested on July 13, 1942, and deported four days later. Epstein started a letter-writing campaign to save his wife. The most disturbing text reproduced in the appendix to *Suite Française* is a letter he addressed to Otto Abetz, the German ambassador in Paris, explaining that her writing was truly anti-Semitic and anti-Bolshevik and she ought to be saved as a friend of the regime. Epstein asked for help from his wife's many friends with Vichy connections: Paul Morand and Madame Morand, both militant anti-Semites, and the Count of Chambrun, Pierre Laval's son-in-law. Epstein was deported soon after.

Suite Française raises fascinating questions about what matters in the experience of reading: content or context. The context of *Suite Française* is endlessly fascinating—the recovered manuscript, the deported writer, the ambiguity of her choices and the cruelty of her fate. Then there is the novel itself. Is it a masterpiece or, as Anita Brookner argued last year in *The Spectator*, a “society novel,” less interesting than the writer's notes? Brookner is half right: It is a society novel. But it's also a great one, in the devastating tradition of Edith Wharton.

The most surprising aspect of *Suite Française*, especially given the emphasis on Némirovsky's life in the notes accompanying the text, is how little her particular situation seems to have influenced her story, at least in the obvious ways. She does not write about the condition of Jews in France, which must have been foremost in her mind. She writes about the most “pure-blooded” French, the people who went along with Pétain, people in her own circle—Catholic French bourgeois. And she does it with supreme lucidity. That's why, whatever one might say about her politics, her choices and her denial, the book, in its unsparing critique of the part of France she had once emulated, triumphs over her life.

Suite Française is divided into two parts. The first, “Storm in June,” is a series of sketches showing different Parisians responding to the trauma known in French history as the *exode*, or “exodus”—the period between May and June 1940, when some 8 million French people fled their homes and took to the roads in anticipation of the German invasion. The government retreated to Bordeaux, then to Vichy. For thousands of more ordinary French people, this was a trauma we can only imagine by thinking of Hurricane Katrina and the thousands of desperate people trying to escape New Orleans. Némirovsky is merciless in depicting the banker, Monsieur Corbin, who orders his faithful assistants, the Michauds, to join him in Tours but refuses to lift a finger to help them get out of Paris. At the train station, they find



Irène Némirovsky, circa 1930

the departure area blocked off by soldiers and a crowd of people crushed against the barriers, mumbling that they will have to walk out of the city: “Everyone spoke with a kind of devastated astonishment. They clearly didn't believe what they were saying. They looked around and expected some miracle: a car, a truck, anything that would take them. But nothing came.”

In the Péricand household, Madame Péricand and her staff fuss over packing as many possessions as possible into the family car and nearly forget about their invalid father-in-law upstairs. On the road, a novelist, an egocentric member of the French Academy, begs a restaurant owner for dinner. “Look here, you know who I

am, don't you? I'm Corte, Gabriel Corte.” Only a bribe gets him food—a basket smelling of foie gras that is ripped from his hands by a thief before Corte has time to open it.

The second part of *Suite Française* is a novella called “Dolce.” Here, a lonely woman finds her first sense of companionship and intimacy with the German officer billeted in her house—an architect and talented pianist in civilian life. Everything changes for Némirovsky's main character when she is asked by the local Resistance to hide a French peasant who has murdered another German officer in the countryside. Her house has many hidden recesses, so she agrees. Némirovsky prepares us for a long-delayed love scene between the French woman and the German officer, then takes it away from us in a way we understand perfectly: After having enjoyed a secret complicity with the officer, she is forced to keep a secret from him. “The love she had welcomed so willingly that she didn't believe it could be shameful, suddenly seemed to her disgraceful madness. She was lying; she was betraying him. How could you call that love?” So in the end, loyalty to her country makes this passion, which could have rescued her from a terrible life of loneliness, impossible. It's a tragedy of Russian proportions.

Némirovsky's description of French-German relations in “Dolce” is far more complicated than many of the allegorical heroic narratives from the years following World War II, such as Vercors's *The Silence of the Sea*, first published underground in 1942, which treats the same theme of fraternization in far less ambiguous terms. There are no heroics in Némirovsky's group portrait of the French bourgeoisie. Most of her stories turn around the central theme of finding shelter in wartime. For all of her characters, asylum fails in one way or another. Those who give shelter are unrewarded or punished; those who take it are disappointed or destroyed. Many others refuse to give asylum when it is needed most. So while her novel is not immediately autobiographical, in its constant attention to the host-guest relationship, Némirovsky expressed with great emotional precision her understanding of the country that betrayed her. Two days before her arrest she wrote her publisher: “I have done a lot of writing. I suppose they will be posthumous works, but it helps pass the time.” A year earlier, she had written in her diary in a much different tone: “My God! What is this country doing to me? Since it is rejecting me,

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let us consider it coldly, let us watch as it loses its honor and its life." Was work on her novel a necessary dissociation from her reality—a way to pass the time—or a final coming to terms? Not knowing is part of what makes *Suite Française*, with its jigsaw of fiction and nonfiction, so gripping.

A few final puzzles within the puzzles: Who knows what might have happened if Némirovsky had survived the camps and had tried to publish *Suite Française* in 1946? It's quite possible she would have been censored by the Resistance for her contributions to *Gringoire*. Other writers were blacklisted for less. Even if she hadn't been included on an official Resistance blacklist, her vision of France in *Suite Française* was so critical, so dark, the novel would have been a slap in the face to Gaul-

list France, with its vision of an eternal French republic untouched by Vichy. The manuscript might have been refused publication, or at least poorly received. Anti-Semitism remained rife in the immediate postwar era, and Némirovsky might have been excoriated as an ungrateful Jew.

It is also tempting to ask what the fate of *Suite Française* might have been had Némirovsky died a natural death during the war. Would her daughter have found a publisher in 2004? How would *Suite Française* have been received without the tragic backstory? Are we capable of reading fiction anymore without being told something poignant, or sensational, or gratifying about the author? Némirovsky's novel, by itself, is so good that I'd like to answer yes. But I'm not sure. ■

The Composer's Craft

BY PAUL MITCHINSON

STRAVINSKY, THE SECOND EXILE: France and America, 1934–1971.

By Stephen Walsh. Knopf. 709 pp. \$40.

The audience at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées was spoiling for a fight. Gathered to hear the much-anticipated Paris premiere of music by Igor Stravinsky, many were determined to stop the performance with a noisy demonstration of their opposition. Shortly after the music began, catcalls and

shouts rained down on the performers. The shouts turned into whistles. Someone pounded so loudly with a hammer that the performance broke down completely, and the orchestra had to start again. It's unlikely that anyone heard much of the controversial music that evening, but scandal-hungry Parisian newspapers still managed to vent their outrage in articles with headlines like "Enough of Stravinsky."

But the story is not as familiar as it sounds. For the year is 1945—not 1913, when the Paris premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, with its jaggedly displaced accents and eerily inhuman melodies, famously provoked a riot. And the work in question, far from hailing the shock of the new, was an amiable piece of orchestral fluff titled *Four Norwegian Moods*. Naturally, the protesters were different too. Instead of a bourgeois subscription audience horrified at a musical and visual spectacle, the 1945 protesters were conservatory students incensed at what they

considered the reactionary hegemony of Stravinsky. It had been a long thirty years: Igor Stravinsky, once the *enfant terrible* of the musical world, was now *démodé*.

The terrifying apparition of artistic obsolescence hovered like a vulture over the last half of Stravinsky's life. On at least one occasion it reduced him to creative paralysis and tears. One famous tale has Stravinsky weeping in a car driven through the Mojave Desert in 1952, confessing that he had lost the inspiration to compose. As his wife, Vera, gently soothed him, Stravinsky turned to the other occupant of the car, his inseparable assistant, Robert Craft. Perhaps, he hinted to Craft, a solution might be found in the music of Arnold Schoenberg. Despite having spent the past few decades ignoring Schoenberg's radical attacks on tonality, Stravinsky admitted that he had recently been deeply impressed by the music of the late Viennese master. (Schoenberg had died the previous year in Los Angeles, though the two composing giants haughtily ignored each other whenever they crossed paths, as they often did at concerts.) "When he said that he wanted to learn more [about Schoenberg]," Craft

wrote, "I knew that the crisis was over; so far from being defeated, Stravinsky would emerge a new composer."

Chronicle the emergence of this "new" Stravinsky has been a challenge for biographers—though not for want of material. In countless books, articles, interviews and films, Stravinsky meticulously recounted his life and creative philosophy. Craft's own diaries and elegantly composed "conversation books" with Stravinsky remain vivid and essential resources. But the sheer volume of this material is rivaled only by its shameless mendacity. Ten years ago, Richard Taruskin's monumental *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* hacked through the tangled undergrowth of self-serving deceptions planted by the composer and revealed a completely unrecognizable young Stravinsky—a Russian. Though the glittering surface of this famously cosmopolitan composer's music seemed to change with every passing cloud, his "morphology, his basic manner of self-expression, and something that goes far deeper than style," Taruskin wrote, remained unalterably Russian.

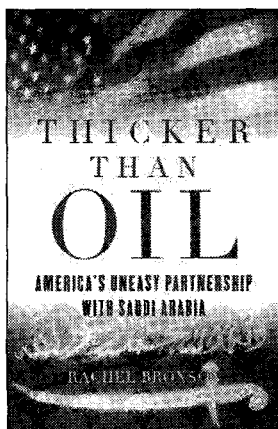
But if Stravinsky was wary about revealing the sources of his musical inspiration, he was positively hostile to exposing details of his personal life. Even Craft has admitted that Stravinsky would have wanted nothing to do with a biography. "I often saw him read and burn old correspondence," Craft has claimed. "Clearly he wished to preserve nothing personal in his so-called archives, and, if the occasion had arisen, he would have made an auto-da-fé of them. So far from condoning any personal biography, if Stravinsky had allowed himself to think about it, he would have specified in his will that none be written."

Not for the first time should we be thankful that Stravinsky's wishes have been tossed aside. With the second and final volume of his massive survey of Stravinsky's life, Stephen Walsh has completed what is by far the most thorough, judicious and illuminating biographical study of the composer yet published. Walsh disobeys, disbelieves and generally debunks Stravinsky's claims, while remarkably managing to maintain a tone that is consistently respectful—even affectionate—toward the composer himself. This, it turns out, is both a strength and a weakness.

Continental Europe's cultural elite followed a well-beaten path to the United States in the 1930s. Stravinsky, as always, found his own way. While many artists, musicians and writers fled the twin threats of Fascism and Nazism, Stravinsky had a long and shameful history

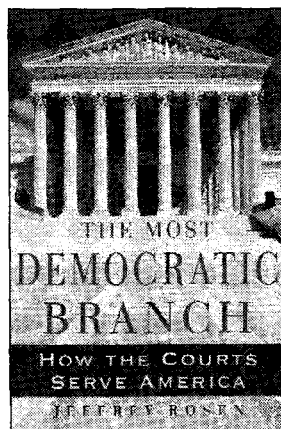
Paul Mitchinson, a historian in Toronto, has written on music for the National Post, Newsday and Andante.com.

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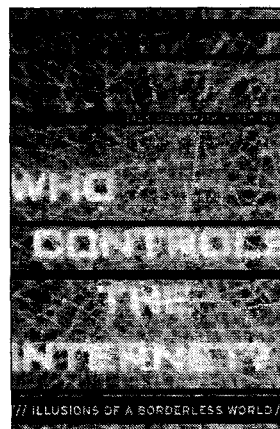
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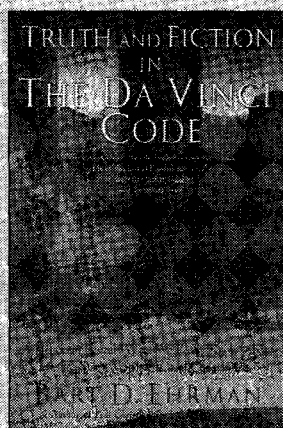
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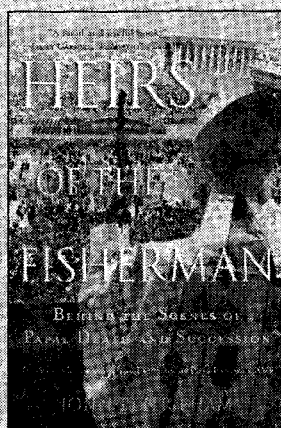
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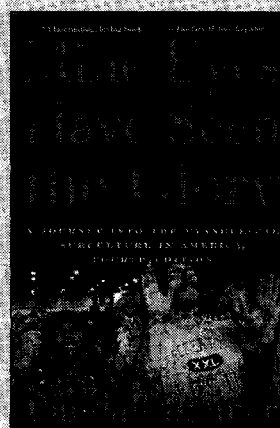
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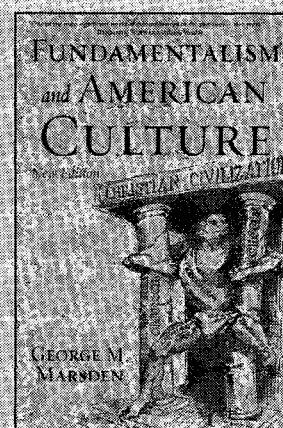
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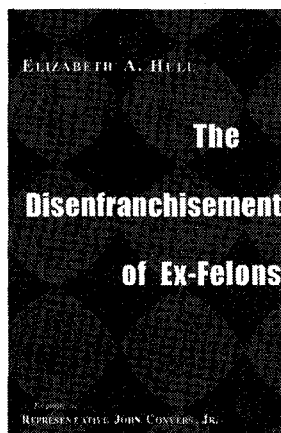
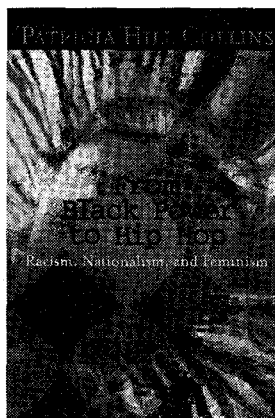
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of lauding the former and quietly tolerating the latter. "I have an overpowering urge to render homage to your Duce," he assured an Italian music critic in 1933. "He is the saviour of Italy and—let us hope—of Europe."

As for the Nazis, Stravinsky's only known complaint about them was that they seemed unaccountably hostile to his music. He seemed particularly enraged that German newspaper reports in the 1930s persisted in referring to him as a Jew. Shortly after Hitler's accession to power, he provided his German publisher with a detailed genealogy of his Polish noble roots, and declared himself fundamentally in line with the Nazi loathing of "all communism, all Marxism, the execrable Soviet monster," as well as "all liberalism, democratism, atheism, etc." As late as 1938, he traveled to Berlin to record his most recent ballet, *Jeu de cartes*, with the Berlin Philharmonic. When, despite his best efforts, his music was still denounced in the 1938 "Degenerate Music" exhibition in Düsseldorf, he desperately entreated Nazi authorities to retract his inclusion. A few months later his German publisher reassured him that his "position in Germany is apparently completely re-established." Telefunken, which had recorded *Jeu de cartes*, was now hoping to entice Stravinsky to record his first three ballets.

Walsh admits that Stravinsky's behavior does appear, "with all allowances made...grotesque," but here and elsewhere, his criticisms of Stravinsky's behavior seem bizarrely reluctant and often strikingly irrelevant. He seems most troubled not by the transparent content of Stravinsky's political statements but by the possibility that the composer—"so subtle and intelligent"—might have "abase[d]" himself before Nazi authorities.

However we judge the Stravinsky of the 1930s, the fact remains that America changed him. When the composer sailed into New York Harbor in September 1939, few could have anticipated this transformation. Fresh from a triple family tragedy—his elder daughter, wife and mother had all died within the past year—he had come to America to deliver the Norton Lectures at Harvard. Within a couple of years he married his longstanding mistress, Vera Sudeykin, and purchased a home in West Hollywood. Colleagues from his earlier days noticed that he smiled more and seemed more relaxed. He was soon hobnobbing with celebrities like Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, Edward G. Robinson and Cecil B. De Mille and occupying himself with a busy conducting schedule. His politics changed to reflect this new American identity, and he now transferred his political allegiances from Fascist strongmen to New Deal Democrats. "As far as I am concerned," he told his friend the composer Nicolas Nabokov, "they can have their generalissimos and Fuhrers. Leave me Mr. Truman and I'm quite satisfied."

In terms of actual music-making, though, Stravinsky's situation was far less encouraging. Despite his best efforts and the support of friends, he seemed incapable of breaking into the lucrative business of movie music that his Hollywood friends had been urging on him. *Four Norwegian Moods*, it should be remembered, was just one of several failed attempts at composing for the silver screen, and clear evidence that Stravinsky, for perhaps the only time in his life, was unable to master the demands imposed by a particular creative form. The few other works composed during these early years in America seemed for the most part minor, inconsequential, and elicited barely a shrug from the world's musical elite. "The battles we have fought for Stravinsky, and how dazzled we were by each work of his," wrote one nostalgic critic as early as 1935. Stravinsky's latest music "will please some, irritate or sadden others, but the time of furies and enthusiasms is alas well and truly past." And so, it appeared, was the creative career of Igor Stravinsky.

Into this void stepped a young Juilliard conducting student named Robert Craft. In 1944, when he was just 20, Craft began writing to Stravinsky. He wooed the 61-year-old composer as a "lover-from-afar," in Walsh's words, "shadowing his idol from the stage door to his car, hanging around at rehearsals, hoping for some miraculous introduction, but not daring to put himself forward or declare himself in any way." The romantic imagery is entirely appropriate. Craft himself describes a 1947 rehearsal of *Perséphone* where he managed to watch Stravinsky "change his shirt and undershirt, at which time I caught a glimpse of his naked torso." He lingers over the image of Stravinsky drying his back with a towel "like a shoe-shine boy's polishing" and dousing himself with *eau de cologne*.

But it was, finally, a combination of flattery and usefulness, rather than erotic attraction, that wore down Stravinsky's defenses. When they met in 1948, while Stravinsky was in the middle of working on his opera *The Rake's Progress*, Craft immediately proved his worth, aiding the Russian composer's efforts at understanding the nuances of a language with which he was still far from comfortable.

Craft, though a mere assistant, was an overpowering figure in so many ways. Virtually unknown in 1948, he was almost instantly welcomed into the Stravinsky household and all but adopted by Igor and Vera. Press accounts had a difficult time describing this relationship—one Canadian documentary from the 1960s refers to Craft as Stravinsky's "protégé," a description that gets things almost precisely backward. Craft not only tutored Stravinsky in the finer points of the English language, he stocked Stravinsky's library and even, most famously, explained the music of Arnold Schoenberg to him. It seems almost incredible now, but until the 1950s Stravinsky had never seriously acquainted himself with Schoenberg's infamous system of composition based on twelve-tone rows, or "serial" music.

Craft presents many thorny problems for any Stravinsky biographer, not the least of which is that he is such a gifted writer. His firsthand reflections about Stravinsky, at times contradictory, are masterpieces of evocative writing, vividly conjuring up the spiritual and physical reality of the composer. Walsh's prose pales in comparison. He typically shuns the telling anecdote, and chides Craft repeatedly for his accounts of Stravinsky's meetings with other great artists and writers. "It was evidently another of those occasions when great men meet and talk," he sighs at one point, "because, like Virgil and Dante, great men must meet and talk, or be reported as having talked, in quotable utterances." There is some truth to this complaint, but in choosing to avoid these accounts, Walsh renders Stravinsky's intensely social life unnecessarily claustrophobic and hermetic.

What he struggles heroically—and almost successfully—to do is to disentangle Stravinsky from Craft. The conversation books, as Walsh demonstrates, become increasingly unreliable and cluttered with Craft's own literary constructions as Stravinsky's health declines. *Themes and Episodes*, from 1967, "probably contains nothing written by Stravinsky himself, and possibly not much that he ever actually said." Craft, for his part, was never shy about claiming credit for Stravinsky's creative achievements. A 1962 photograph appearing on the back cover of Craft's *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (1992) has Craft looming over the shoulder of a seated Stravinsky, who appears to be notating a musical score. Look more closely, though, and you see that it is Craft's hand wielding the pencil as he reaches over the composer's shoulder. "I can only repeat," Craft has written, "that without me Stravinsky would not have taken the path he did after *The Rake's Progress*. Those music lovers preferring another opera, more *pas de deux*,

Mind your head.

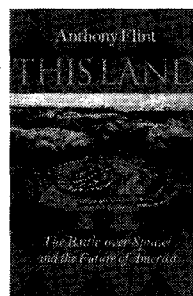
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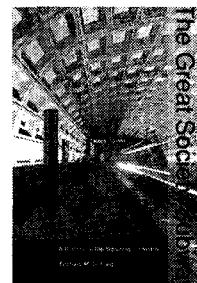
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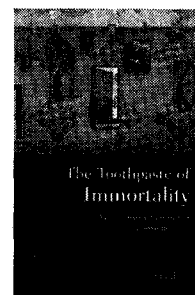
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and some additional concertos, will feel that they have been cheated; others, admirers of Abraham and Isaac, of The Flood and Requiem Canticles, will thank me."

Walsh, for his part, clearly thanks Craft. But he serves up this gratitude with immense helpings of insult and moral outrage. Most of his anger stems from an ugly and protracted legal battle having its roots in Stravinsky's final years, pitting the composer's children from his first marriage against Vera and Craft. All the elements of an ugly dispute are there: a stepmother, an "adopted" son, an extended family... and an immense fortune. The struggle was as predictable in its general course as it was murky in its details. Few people behave well under such circumstances, but Walsh reserves his strongest condemnations—indeed, the strongest abuse in his entire biography—for Craft alone. In publishing unflattering details of Stravinsky's children, Craft is circulating charges that are "so monstrous, so damaging and selective, at times so fallacious, and withal so private, that it seems astonishing today that it was ever dignified with publication." In questioning their affection for a father they rarely saw in his final years, Craft is behaving with "unbelievable vulgarity." One need only compare this invective with the mild language Walsh uses to criticize Stravinsky's philo-Fascism ("distasteful") and crude anti-Semitism ("almost entirely generalized, and surfaced only rarely in a personal context") to see that Craft is not the only one whose close identification with Stravinsky has become a little unhealthy.

Although Walsh's invaluable biography exposes the many and various picayune details that Craft gets wrong, Craft's larger portrait of the composer remains intact. So let us return to that highway through the Mojave Desert, which Craft describes as though it were Stravinsky's personal Road to Damascus. Until quite recently, it was commonplace to assert that twelve-tone composition represented the very destiny of musical history—Stravinsky was just a little late in getting there. When composer Charles Wuorinen reissued the textbook *Simple Composition* in 1994, he left unaltered his pivotal claim that the tonal system "is no longer employed by serious composers of the mainstream. It has been replaced or succeeded by the 12-tone system." Or as Pierre Boulez—one of the noisy protesters at the *Four Norwegian Moods* concert—put it, "Every musician who has not felt... the necessity of the serial language is USELESS."

But did Stravinsky really need Craft—or Schoenberg—to become USEFUL again? Forgive my skepticism. Listening to the music of Stravinsky's final years, with its fresh experiments in instrumental color and ghostly echoes of Renaissance dances and madrigals, one is seldom even remotely aware of the music's "system," so beloved of academic musicologists. Stravinsky almost never seemed to trouble himself

with such analysis, and was famously contemptuous of explaining music in technical terms. Once, while performing part of his *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas* on the piano, he suddenly stopped and turned to his listener, Lawrence Morton. "Here I cheated the row," he whispered conspiratorially, "I did not like the harmony." For Stravinsky, as for all great composers, the music's magic lay in the cheating, not the row. ■

For Reasons of State

LYNN HUNT

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Robespierre is not an easy man to like. Prudish and prickly, the anonymous small-town lawyer rose to leadership of the all-powerful Committee of Public Safety during the convulsive year of radical revolution, July 1793–July 1794. In his most infamous speech, he brazenly justified the use of terror as an instrument of government. Revolution, he insisted, required both virtue and terror: "virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue." This was no mere rhetorical flourish. Revolutionary justice meant dangerously vague laws for trying suspects, summary judgments and executions in batches. The deputies listening to Robespierre's speech hardly felt immune; his signature sent many of his colleagues and even his erstwhile friends to the guillotine. Not surprisingly, the fear he inspired while in power turned instantly into vilification upon his fall. Once arrested and executed by order of the same men who had previously supported him, he became the bloodthirsty symbol of all that had gone awry. When not simply denounced as a tyrant, dictator or aspirant to kingship, he was depicted as jealous, cruel, demonic and fanatical, if not downright cannibalistic.

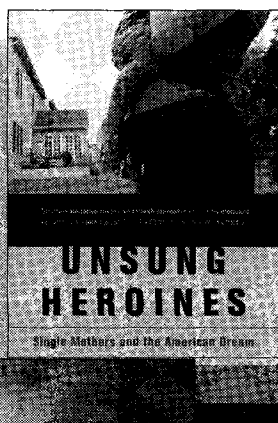
History transformed Robespierre from a highly personalized ogre into the embodiment of revolution itself. The right has been certain of the pedigree, at least since 1917. In their view, the theorist of terror set the mold for all the great revo-

lutionary butchers: Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and, more recently, both Saddam Hussein and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The left has felt less sure of what to do with his legacy. For Marx he was a "terrorist with his head in the clouds," driven by ancient Roman ideals and therefore inherently incapable of sniffing out the ascension of modern bourgeois social relations. But the later French socialists and Russian Bolsheviks, especially Trotsky, lionized him. Trotsky remained obsessed with "the Incorruptible" throughout his life, seeing Lenin and then himself as the true Robespierre of the Russian Revolution. In the late 1930s Trotsky asked one French supporter to help him gather quotes from his paragon to use in his attack on Stalin.

While the right has stuck to its guns on Robespierre, progenitor of political evil, the left has turned more reticent since 1989, the year of the Revolution's bicentennial and of the anti-Communist revolutions in Eastern Europe. Michel Vovelle, the last Communist to hold the chair of the history of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne, always defended his Jacobin ancestor, but in more recent years he has emphasized the Robespierre who demanded universal manhood suffrage, supported emancipation for the Jews and slaves, and served as the "animator" rather than dictator of national defense. The barrister turned revolutionary only agreed to guide the Terror, in this view, in order to control its popular excesses and

Lynn Hunt, the Eugen Weber Professor of Modern European History at UCLA, is the author of several books on the French Revolution.

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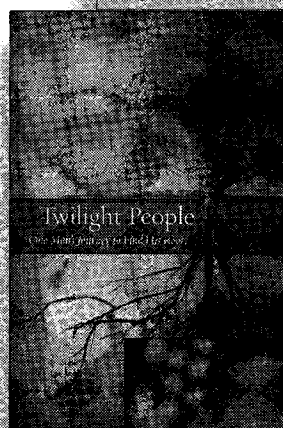
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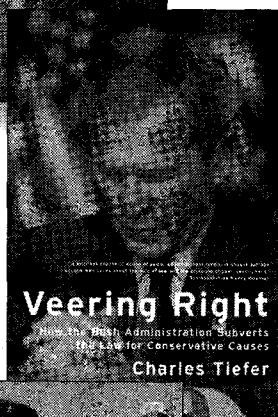


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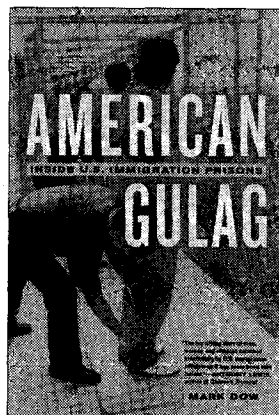
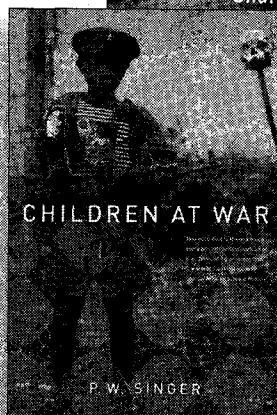
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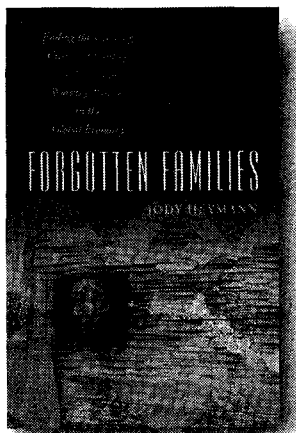
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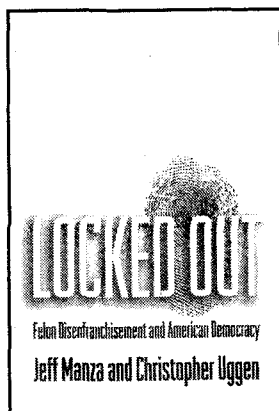
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save the Republic at war. He had, after all, originally opposed the death penalty. Vovelle's Robespierre is the defender of "a certain [social democratic] idea" of the Republic rather than the precursor of Communist revolution.

The left's current hesitations about Robespierre turn, of course, on his defense of revolutionary violence. Where should the line be drawn? Trotsky, for one, saw no moral dilemma: Violence in the name of "historically progressive tendencies" was not just acceptable; it was required. Yet if this classic end-justifies-the-means argument is rejected, as it must be, then what is going to take its place? Pacifist rejection of any and all forms of political violence? Acceptance of violence only when perpetrated in the name of already established authority? War has justified the abrogation of civil liberties many times in American history, and our own civil war hardly brought out the best in our collective behavior. The present embarrassment of the left in the face of past revolutionary legacies has run the risk of stopping the conversation about these issues altogether. As a result, the easier positions of historians such as Simon Schama rule the terrain. For Schama, "In some depressingly unavoidable sense, violence was the Revolution itself." In his 1989 history, *Citizens*, he reels off endless, dizzying, sensationalist accounts of revolutionary blood and gore over more than 800 pages of narrative and devotes exactly one paragraph to the white counter-Terror of 1794–95 with its masses of largely uncounted victims of political retribution.

The answer does not lie, however, in a renewed competition between balance sheets, if only because we can never know the numbers with any precision. How would we prioritize the thousands executed by guillotine, the tens of thousands or perhaps hundreds of thousands killed in the Vendée civil war, and the millions who died in the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars? Is it the absolute number of victims that counts, or the way in which they died? The point is not to justify some deaths and discount others. It is rather to understand why, as Ruth Scurr says at the beginning of her book on Robespierre, *Fatal Purity*, hopes for liberty, equality and fraternity "issued" in the Terror. Here, in deceptively neutral language, is the nub of the question: Did the Terror, as Scurr seems to imply, flow from "popular sovereignty, representative democracy, rights and happiness" themselves? Was the idea of democracy somehow tainted with terror from the beginning? And if not, then what did produce terror? Is it a built-in component of all revolutions?

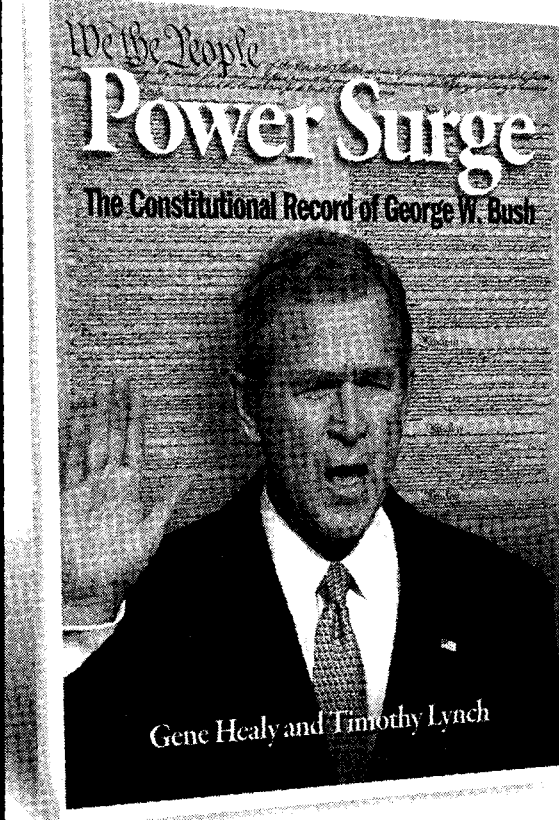
Robespierre seems the perfect vehicle for answering these questions, since he began his revolutionary career as a democratic idealist only to end it as an agent of encompassing repression. Scurr adds no new evidence to the investigation of Robespierre, nor does she aim to give a full account of all that has been written about him or the Terror in recent years. But she does aspire to balance and dares to show more sympathy for him than is often the case. Because she wants to "see things from his point of view" and because she tells the story from a biographical perspective, she inevitably offers a more psychologically inflected account than most, without ever straying into the more questionable forms of psychologizing about her subject's motives.

Because of the controversy surrounding Robespierre's political role, it is difficult even to draw a picture of what he was like as a man. Only the most basic facts command agreement. Born in the northern French market town of Arras in 1758, young Maximilien lost his mother when he was 6 and went to live with relatives when his father abandoned him, his brother and his two sisters. He won a scholarship to the elite Collège Louis-le-Grand in Paris and gained admission to the bar at age 23. As an adult he stood five feet two or three inches tall, not especially short for the time. He never relinquished the bourgeois proprieties, continuing all through the Revolution to powder his hair and wear embroidered waistcoats. He wore eyeglasses, supposedly tinted green. And he remained a bachelor. Everything else is up for grabs: He was a prize student; he was secretive, dishonest and always envious of the other pupils. He was beloved by all those close to him; he never had a single friend. He was too shy and reserved to marry before the Revolution began; he indulged in orgiastic affairs during the Revolution. Scurr makes her way carefully through these minefields of dispute, concluding that as a person Maximilien was "melancholy, serious, reserved and stubborn: a loner, a dreamer, someone who never forgot an offense." The characterization helps explain Robespierre's later behavior: He took democracy to its logical conclusions, even when no one else would; in his solitude, he easily imagined conspiracies being hatched against him; and he positively relished the prospect of martyrdom for the cause.

In 1789, however, these qualities mattered little because Robespierre arrived on the national stage as a bit player. He won election as deputy to the Estates General because he had developed a local reputation in Arras as defender of the

downtrodden and critic of the more backward aspects of the French legal system. Arriving in Versailles with not much more than a change of clothes, he slowly began to attract attention, not all of it positive. "He is too wordy and does not know when to stop," wrote one fellow deputy, "but he has a store of eloquence and bitterness that will distinguish him from the crowd." Robespierre repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to embrace unpopular positions. He denounced the proposed property requirements for voting and advocated the widest possible freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion as well as full citizenship for Jews and free men of color (like virtually everyone else, he showed no interest in women's political rights). In addition to opposing the death penalty, he supported the abolition of slavery, at a moment when the tiny handful of abolitionists faced nearly universal scorn. "Let the colonies perish," he defiantly proclaimed, rather than let slavery continue.

These positions might have tagged the austere northerner as a crank during these early years, but the most famous deputy, Mirabeau, predicted that "Robespierre will go far, for he believes everything he says." Although Robespierre failed to carry the day on most of these questions, he did win his fellow deputies over to his view that none of those currently serving should be eligible for election to the legislature under the new Constitution. So he, like everyone else, went off to find other employment. He temporarily took up a position as public prosecutor in Paris but dropped it to spend most of his time at the Jacobin Club, cradle of democracy or totalitarianism, depending on your point of view. Nicknamed the Jacobin Club because it met in an abandoned monastery whose monks had been known as Jacobins, the group brought together the leading lights of the still-nascent left. Because "party" connoted division and sectarianism, the Jacobins could not advertise themselves as such. Yet they came closer than any other group to acting like one, and Robespierre proved adept at making the most of the club's potential. He attended every meeting and intervened in most discussions, often before a sizable audience; he sent printed copies of his speeches to some of the hundreds of affiliated clubs in the provinces; he wrote personal responses to the many local clubs that corresponded with the mother society; and since he could no longer speak in the assembly, he started his own weekly newspaper to publicize his views to a larger audience. In elections for a National Convention, called to replace the monarchy in September 1792, the voters of Paris chose him first.



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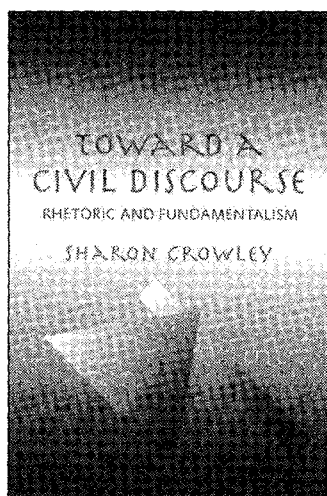
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The newly elected deputy still lived in the same reduced circumstances as before, but almost everything else had changed. Two-thirds of the army officers, most of them nobles, had crossed the border to fight with the armies now aligned against France. As the enemy moved toward the capital, mobs killed hundreds of prisoners suspected of collaboration. The king and queen lived under house arrest in Paris, awaiting a decision on their fate. Unthinkable three years before, a republic now seemed inevitable. Universal manhood suffrage had already been declared. In short, everyone else had caught up with Robespierre. But so had events. The deputies ordered the execution of the king for treason in January 1793. The new republic added Great Britain, the Dutch Republic and Spain to its list of declared enemies. Rebellion of the slaves in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) threatened French control of its richest colony. The introduction of conscription sparked resistance in France, and within weeks peasant armies in the thousands were attacking towns seen as favorable to the republic. Divisions within the Convention about how to proceed came to a head in early June 1793. When armed national guardsmen circled the Convention, those inside voted for the arrest of twenty-nine moderate colleagues seen as unfavorable to the Paris militants. Their arrest provoked yet more resistance and yet more repression. By the summer of 1793 "national emergency" hardly began to describe the situation.

Only at this moment did Robespierre seize the reins of power. In July 1793 his fellow deputies elected him to the Committee of Public Safety, which, in the absence of any other executive power, carried out the will of the Convention. But this team of horses had no fewer than twelve drivers. The Convention (which shelved its new Constitution until peacetime) voted on the membership of its key committee every month; the great mass of deputies could not simply be ignored. The committee itself was no monolith either. Robespierre could always count on his two followers on the committee, the wheelchair-bound Couthon and 26-year-old Saint-Just (what a pair!), but he continually had to persuade the other nine members, most of them with different leanings and not inconsiderable skills of their own.

Here Scurr's method reveals its limitations. Her focus on one individual ultimately leads her to overlook underlying structural causes. She aptly recounts Robespierre's ability to turn debate on the floor of the Convention in his favor at critical moments. But she fails to ex-

plain that Robespierre looms as large as he does because of the fundamental weakness of revolutionary government. Terror was not the product of dictatorship or ideology, much less the brainchild of one man. It was a set of strategies haphazardly devised by a constantly shifting coalition of middle-class men trying to establish a republic without any real foundation on which to build. Once the gadfly who only talked the talk of democratic republicanism, Robespierre found himself with eleven colleagues facing the impossible task of defending a nation with an army but no government, with a dead king but no Constitution, with sped-up trials but no legitimacy. Robespierre expressed both the aspirations and the almost hysterical fears of the committee and the deputies at large. He neither invented nor produced them; he only gave them voice.

Scurr sets out to answer the same wrong question that has bedeviled so many accounts of the Terror. She asks how Robespierre could have come to incarnate the Terror and with it the entire French Revolution. The question rests on a double fallacy—that Robespierre is the Terror, that the Terror is the French Revolution—whose lure is easily understood. The Terror has always remained the most controversial, the most discussed and the most remembered period in the French Revolution. Because the machinery of the Terror disintegrated after the fall of Robespierre in July 1794, many have concluded that Robespierre and the Terror were somehow coterminous. Even in his richly detailed new book *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*, David Andress seems to fall into this trap. The identification of the Terror with Robespierre certainly comforted those who overthrew "the Robespierrists," since a good number of them had taken even more extreme "terrorist" positions than the archvillain himself. While it may be true, as Scurr writes, that Robespierre's "self-centered rhetoric, clean living, clear principles, and passionate political commitment made him seem like the Revolution incarnate," it is also beside the point.

Robespierre undoubtedly turned many a memorable phrase because he believed that he spoke for the Revolution's most profound principles. But the other deputies only tolerated this pretension as long as the situation demanded what he offered: an ability to keep popular violence in check while indefatigably pursuing victory on the Revolution's multiple fronts and obscuring the fact that the "regime" lacked all the basic elements of rule. Once the French gained the upper hand in both the foreign

and civil wars, Robespierre's days were numbered. A closer analysis would show that Robespierre had talked so boldly of "terror" because he had to respond to militants' pressure to make "terror the order of the day." Demonstrators made this explicit demand in the hall of the Convention in September 1793. Robespierre and his colleagues had to answer to their base in Paris without losing sight altogether of their aim to found a nationwide republic (hence the phrase "virtue, without which terror is fatal"). Terror could not be denied altogether but it had to be yoked to some kind of justice, however truncated and deformed. As Andress shows in his account, the deputies obsessed about legalism even when shamefully removing all meaningful protections for the defense of the accused. Rivals might have been dispatched without true justice, but they were not taken away and secretly murdered in the night; they stood trial in public. On the night of his own arrest, Robespierre worried that a counter-decree signed by him would have no legal standing.

My aim is not to excuse terror or Robespierre's role in it. It is important, however, not to be seduced by Robespierre's own self-importance or by his colleagues' desire to blame him for policies for which they also bore heavy responsibility. If we are to understand how terror arises, in revolution or not, the big picture must be kept in mind. Terror was the last resort of those who had too little support for their overly ambitious programs. War abroad, civil war and resistance at home, and deep divisions over the future of the polity set the stage for fear of conspiracy, repression of dissent and executions of vaguely defined enemies. Since the decline and fall of Communism, scholars and commentators have tended to reject any explanation of the Terror that pointed to the circumstances in which the French republicans found themselves. Current events are casting a different light on the question. Rumor, conspiracy, constant harping on imminent dangers, accusing political opponents of being unpatriotic, internment camps, even lists of suspects vaguely defined have all made a shocking reappearance in the US "war on terror," along with torture, a practice repudiated by the French even though they had grown up under a monarchy that routinely administered it under court supervision. If the leaders of the most powerful nation in the world can react in this fashion to the threats, albeit real, of small cells of terrorists financed by foreign powers, is it really so hard to imagine that the French responded as they did? Terror, we have rediscovered, has many uses. ■

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The Body Artist

PETER PLAGENS

EAKINS REVEALED: The Secret Life of an American Artist.

By Henry Adams. Oxford. 583 pp. \$40.

THE REVENGE OF THOMAS EAKINS.

By Sidney D. Kirkpatrick. Yale. 565 pp. \$39.95.

The great American realist painter Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) had a real jones for naked people. As a prominent teacher at the renowned Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, he jettisoned classes in still life and composition in favor of yet more instruction in front of the nude model. On field trips

with groups of male students, he took photographs of them posing, without clothes, against woodsy backdrops. On a couple of these outings, Eakins removed his own garments. And when a woman student couldn't quite grasp what he was telling the class about pelvic movements, he promptly took her to his studio, dropped trou and demonstrated them. But what got Eakins into real trouble—bounced from the academy and viewed as even more of a pariah by polite Philadelphia—was removing the loincloth from a male model in the presence of female students in January 1886.

Was the artist merely a passionate pedagogue whose zealousness about the importance to art of anatomical expertise rendered him unfortunately oblivious to social convention? Or was Eakins indeed a deeply disturbed person? Henry Adams's *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist* argues, as it were, for the prosecution. He adds, to Eakins's conspicuous interest in undressing and rear ends, suspicious attractions to family conflict, mental illness, incest (he was accused inconclusively of having a relationship with one of his sisters) and—this is America, remember—guns. But a new biography, Sidney Kirkpatrick's *The Revenge of Thomas Eakins*, takes the side of the defendant: "Eakins' frank approach to nudity...suggests two strong forces tugging within his personality: one was an innate, curious innocence, the other a socially fraught, nearly pathological desire to come to terms with the impulse that drove him...from the Jefferson Medical College to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts."

Peter Plagens, art critic for Newsweek, is the author of Sunshine Muse: Art on the West Coast, 1945–70 and the novel Time for Robo, among other works. He is also a painter.

Middle-class life in Philadelphia in the mid-nineteenth century was, as in most large Eastern American cities, a dour, stratified, what-will-the-neighbors-say business. Benjamin Eakins (who pronounced his last name the way his Irish-immigrant father spelled it, Akens) was a high school teacher who moonlighted in real estate and a few other enterprises to keep his wife and four children comfortable. He wanted his younger son to move up a couple of rungs on the social ladder. Thomas Eakins complied as far as making a sincere but brief run at medical school, but a predilection for drawing—he was a schoolboy whiz at mechanical drafting—ultimately led him to art school at the academy. He did well enough to be able to treat himself, with his long-suffering father's help, to the equivalent of a junior year abroad. Eakins landed in Paris in time for the 1867 Exposition Universelle, where the French fell in love with everything American—locomotives, chewing tobacco, peach cobbler and soda fountains—except American art. No disagreement from Eakins, who called it a "dismal failure."

But Eakins, who was aesthetically constricted enough as a young man to think Delacroix a miserable painter, was no great shakes in France. "As a student in Paris," writes Adams, "he had unusual difficulty learning to make competent paintings, and he left France abruptly, with no honors or awards, seemingly at a midpoint in his training." Not that he didn't try to live *la vie artistique*. Emily Sartain, a sort of girlfriend (these relationships were always fuzzy with Eakins), came to Paris with William Dean Howells and his family for a visit. Eakins and Sartain were walking through a park when some art-student pals accompanied by what they used to call "women of ill repute" walked by and said hello. Sartain was horrified and asked Eakins to promise never to employ such females as models. He

refused—a matter of creative principle—and he and Sartain parted, making no plans to see each other again.

Back in the States, Eakins started his long, slow climb to controversial prominence as a different, more scientific, sort of realist painter. He enthusiastically employed the camera, both as a research and sketching tool and as a way of getting things "right" on the final canvas. Kirkpatrick sees Eakins's pictorial technology as a sure index of greatness: "Just as the Renaissance masters had explored the devices of a new age, Eakins had availed himself of the revolutionary scientific advances of his generation—and along the way invented the art of realism in a new form." That sounds fine until you come to Kirkpatrick's own analysis of Eakins's 1881 painting *Singing a Pathetic Song*, a portrait of academy music student Margaret Harrison performing an operatic aria. "Harrison's image appears as if the artist has superimposed it on the scene," Kirkpatrick says, "and the photographs Eakins employed for the painting suggest that this, in fact, was what he did.... The most likely explanation for Eakins' uncharacteristic failure to realistically portray the scene was the novelty of working directly from photographs for modeling his principal subject." Sidney Kirkpatrick, meet Sidney Kirkpatrick.

Aside from the occasional deleterious consequences of relying too much on photography, Eakins had other problems with his painting. John Singer Sargent could produce a decent picture in an afternoon and crank out a life-size portrait in as little as a week. Eakins would torture a painting for months, even years; with portraits, his subjects had to endure dozens of sittings. And despite the artist's skill, dedication and diligent labor, many sitters refused or returned the finished product. Eakins, Kirkpatrick writes with gushy redundancy, "has the unique distinction of having had more of his paintings destroyed than any other great artist of modern times." Right up through the 2001 Philadelphia Museum of Art retrospective, this was the prevailing view of Eakins: a blunt, no-nonsense perfectionist refusing to be hamstrung by Victorian phobias, pretentious patrons wanting to be made to look pretty or Sunday-at-the-museum audiences wanting to be made happy by idyllic landscapes with lots of flowers in them.

Adams, a professor of art history at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, sees a darker personality behind it all. He writes: "At the heart of my investigation is a relatively simple notion: that Eakins's paintings, which invariably portray somber

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Dr. Robert Bucholz, D.Phil., is Associate Professor of History at Loyola University of Chicago. He received his undergraduate education in history at Cornell University and his doctorate in modern history from Oxford University.

Professor Bucholz has received several awards for his teaching, including the Sujack Award for Teaching Excellence, the highest such award presented by the Loyola College of Arts and Sciences, and the Honors Program Faculty Member of the Year Award in both 1998 and 1999.

He is the author or coauthor of three books, including *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture*.

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or depressed people, and which often portray disturbing subjects, represent a tragic outlook that must have had some basis in his own life experience." This rather reasonable-seeming premise—we live in an age where great artists are assumed to be miserable at bottom, with that misery showing up prominently in their art—sets Adams at odds with today's conventional wisdom about Eakins (which, Adams notes, is a "complete inversion" of how the painter was generally regarded in his own time: as a gnarly, licentious—albeit talented—jerk whose peculiar aesthetic sense and extreme obstinacy caused too many of his pictures to turn out ugly). Adams debunks, in particular, Lloyd Goodrich, the eminent art historian and museum director (called "our Department of Truth, and our National Bureau of Standards," by John Wilmerding, an almost equal luminary in the field) whose 1933 monograph created the flinty, visionary Eakins we've known until now. Goodrich's interview notes, says Adams, "have become available since his death, and they reveal that he withheld any material that did not fit into a comfortable pattern of interpretation."

Adams's psychological indictment starts with Eakins's overall attitude toward women (he thought them inferior, much preferred to hang around with men and actively tried to keep women in their place), makes a few calls on the artist's paintings of women (which show them in unflattering lighting, heavy-limbed and weary and bathed in "melancholy and emotional trauma") and proceeds to dissect Eakins's relationships with members of the opposite sex. Eakins was engaged for several years, under pressure from his father, to a woman in whom he had no romantic interest. As for his marriage, even the Scott McClellan-ish Kirkpatrick quotes an Eakins confidant as saying that Eakins's wife, Susan, "was kinda killed...[by Tom]. She would have been a great painter if she hadn't married." A former student named Lillian Hammitt went nuts believing that Eakins would leave his wife and marry her, an occurrence Adams attributes to the artist's "clearly [being her] 'Svengali'" and a "master of psychological control and masculine domination." As for specific incidents, Adams offers up several as creepy

as this: When Eakins visited a fellow artist who was painting a portrait of a young woman from Philadelphia, he went right into the next room and emerged from it nude. "I don't know whether you ever saw a naked man before," he said to the startled sitter. "I thought you might like to see one."

Eakins *Revealed* is less a full-fledged biography than an exposé intended to correct prevailing opinion. Even so, Kirkpatrick, a non-art-historian "investigative journalist" with a biography of the American psychic Edgar Cayce under his belt, gives Adams's book surprisingly short shrift. He notes in passing only that "biog-



Thomas Eakins, circa 1904

rapher Henry Adams has suggested in his Freudian interpretation of Eakins" that the reason Eakins painted portraits of Catholic priests in their ecclesiastical robes was that he liked men in dresses. Indeed, Kirkpatrick's book—a fairly serviceable and complete biography filled with, for instance, full accounts of Eakins's upbringing and of Philadelphia back in the day—is almost militantly sunny. "The evidence, taken at face value," he writes, "suggests that Eakins was a normal, well-adjusted, and dutiful son. Along with his siblings, he was also a dedicated caregiver." "By all accounts," he adds later, "married life thoroughly agreed with Eakins, as it did with his bride."

A few early reviews having clued me in to *Eakins Revealed*'s take on the painter, I read *Revenge* first, so as not to unfairly burden it with disproving Adams's thesis. (Nasty is also more page-turny than nice.) But a name on Kirkpatrick's dedication page caught my eye: "artist Mercedes Thurlbeck." An unusual name, one an art critic like me should find familiar if the artist has anything going at all, careerwise. So I scoured the Internet. It turns out that Thurlbeck (who's in her 20s) was a still photographer on the set of a film called *Lolli-Love*, from the infamous Troma studios. I also found that she is the daughter of Kirkpatrick's wife, Nancy, a Cayce devotee who persuaded Kirkpatrick to write *Edgar*

Cayce: An American Prophet and led the eventual Eakins biographer to become a devotee himself. The covers of Kirkpatrick's two books are, incidentally, strikingly similar: a big face of the subject on the dust jacket, looking confidently toward the future.

I admit that this "uh-oh" moment was potentially prejudicial. But I was also aware of the possible consequence to this essay, and put it on hold until presented with corroborating evidence that Kirkpatrick leans toward hagiography. A strong indication arrived, however, in the "Contents" pages. Kirkpatrick's chapter titles are either embarrassing clichés ("An Uncertain Future," "Rough Around the Edges," "The Artist and His Muse," "The Road Less Traveled," "Uncompromising Realism," "The Unflinching Eye," "Talk of the Town," "Point of No Return" and "A League of His Own") or such hilarious couplets as "Heads and Hands," "Hikers and Hunters," "Nudes and Prudes," "Philanthropists and Philistines," "Demons and Demigods" and "Pontiffs and Prelates." Confirmation that puff pieces and awful writing often go hand in hand came in the text: "The nineteen-year-old Eakins had much to learn." "Eakins wielded his brush with a hand as steady as the one Dr. Gross used to guide his scalpel." And "Like a dam breaking, a deluge of unabashedly laudatory praise followed."

In the end, your understanding of Eakins will come down to a variant on *The New Yorker* magazine's old humorous filler item "Which Newspaper D'ya

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Ani DiFranco is a longstanding *Nation* reader.



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Read?" Do you believe the art history professor with vast scholarly knowledge and experience looking at art, who also has some professional axes to grind? Or do you hold with the ostensibly disinterested outsider, an experienced journalist who's also in the thrall of a homegrown Nostradamus and writes like a *People* magazine reporter?

Kirkpatrick makes Eakins's decision to pay for a Civil War exemption (a common, legal practice) a matter of conscience having to do with his being an only son overcoming his belief that a war to end slavery was certainly just. Adams downgrades the artist's agonizing to his simply being under his father's thumb.

"Eakins must naturally have been distraught," Kirkpatrick says about the death of his nominal fiancée, Kathrin Crowell. "Eakins may well have been relieved when Kathrin died of meningitis at the age of twenty-eight," counters Adams.

About Lillian Hammitt, Kirkpatrick says blandly that from other direct experiences with psychopathology "Eakins knew and recognized mental instability and was doing what he believed best for Hammitt." In addition to his "Svengali" comment, Adams writes, "One of the most notable patterns of Eakins's life is that he seems to have attracted and 'collected' people who were weak or psychologically vulnerable, and then to have preyed upon those weaknesses. Several of his students, including Lillian Hammitt, Ella Crowell [Kathrin's sister, whose genitals Eakins probably touched under the guise of instruction in anatomy], Douglass Morgan Hall, and Benjamin Fox (who posed for *Swimming*) ended their lives in insanity."

Kirkpatrick says that Eakins "did not have the slightest clue that his own assistants [including his star disciple, Thomas Anshutz] and their friends were the ring-leaders of the efforts—not idle gossip but a true conspiracy—to have him dismissed" from the academy following the loincloth scandal. Adams says that Anshutz was a "modest, even-tempered" man, undriven by institutional ambition, who would not have taken the risk of trying to oust the then-powerful Eakins from the school.

And so on. Adams is the proverbial fanatical DA who could, to paraphrase the courtroom chestnut, indict a ham sandwich for sexual misconduct. If Kirkpatrick, on the other hand, had seen Eakins sitting in a minivan, exposing himself to young soccer players, he probably would have figured Eakins was just an assistant

coach changing into his shorts. Think I'm exaggerating? Try this: "Another incident found Eakins painting a portrait of the buxom wife of a prominent businessman. He stepped away from his easel and poked his fingers into her lace bodice. 'Feeling for bones,' he blithely remarked." This vignette is followed immediately by another, about Eakins's causing a female patron to flee the room "when Eakins expressed his joy in having her model. 'How beautiful an old woman's skin is,' he exclaimed. 'All those wrinkles!'" Kirkpatrick's clear intent is to pass off an obvious groping as merely part of Eakins's forgetting his manners because he's lost in his art.

How times change, and change again. In Eakins's own day, a good portion of proper Philadelphia wanted him run out of town because of rumors about such unseemly behavior. Seventy years ago, Goodrich dealt with the same unpleasanties by simply covering them up. Thirty-five years ago, in the Age of Aquarius, Eakins—to the extent that he was thought about at all—was a groovy art professor who defied the fuddy-duddy administrators and let it all hang out. Now in the early twenty-first century, with its hyper-consciousness of anything remotely resembling sexual harassment, it's a whole different ball game.

Adams quotes the feminist art historian Jennifer Doyle:

With the cultural anxieties that swirl around sex and the workplace, not many would be inclined openly and unambivalently to support a project that involved, as did *The Swimming Hole*, a teacher spending an afternoon taking photographs of himself naked with students. Furthermore, how many of us can honestly say that we are sure enough of the boundary that protects student-teacher relationships to spend an afternoon naked with our students—and take pictures—and show them to our colleagues—and believe that we would keep our posts?

It's hard to say whether Thomas Eakins would have been better or worse off today than he was in old-time Philadelphia. As a painter right now, he'd probably be headlining in a blue-chip New York gallery, out-selling John Currin. As a teacher, he'd be a defrocked professor permanently blacklisted from even a minimum-wage adjunct position. But as a guy who obviously got his jollies by asking women to pose nude for him, and by taking off his clothes in front of other people, he'd likely be happy as a lark with the screen name "Philly-hotguy86," sitting naked in front of his webcam, trolling the Internet for amateur models. ■

High Culture, Low Politics

ANDREAS HUYSEN

THE SEDUCTION OF CULTURE IN GERMAN HISTORY.

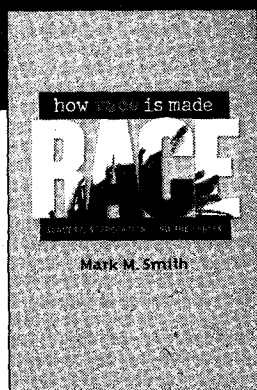
By Wolf Lepenies. Princeton. 260 pp. \$24.95.

Germany's *Kultur*—its music, its classic and Romantic literature and art, its philosophy, its university system and its science—has been admired and emulated, sometimes envied and feared, but always, if sometimes begrudgingly, recognized as an inalienable part of European civilization. But after the nineteenth-century "Land der Dichter und Denker" (country of poets and thinkers) became the "Land der Richter und Henker" (country of judges and executioners), as Karl Kraus famously put it, the unsettling proximity of German *Kultur* to barbarism became a standard trope. Auschwitz inmates forced to perform Mozart and Beethoven, Goethe's Weimar right next to Buchenwald, Adolf Hitler's Wagner cult and Albert Speer's megalomaniacal architectural fantasies—this is what reminds us that German *Kultur* not only failed to stem the tide of fascism but was effortlessly appropriated by the Nazis and thus contributed to Hitler's rise.

Andreas Huyssen, Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia, is a founding editor of *New German Critique* and the author, most recently, of *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*.

The German tendency to see in culture a legitimate, even noble substitute for parliamentary and democratic politics is the topic of Wolf Lepenies's extended essay. The story Lepenies tells in *The Seduction of Culture in German History* is not new. It has

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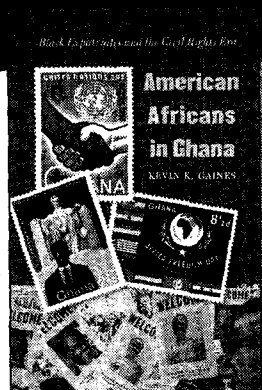


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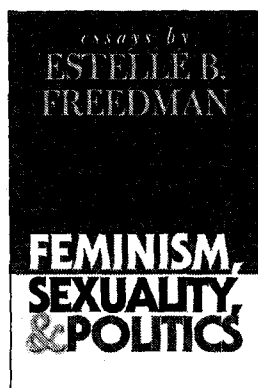
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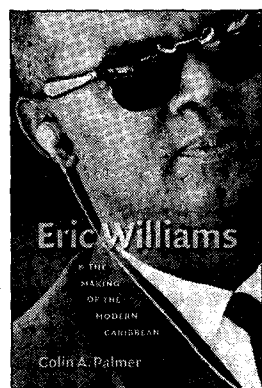


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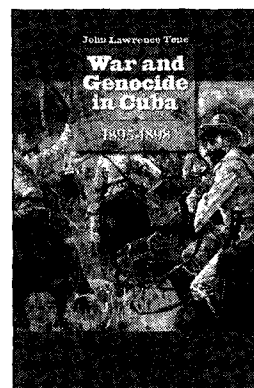


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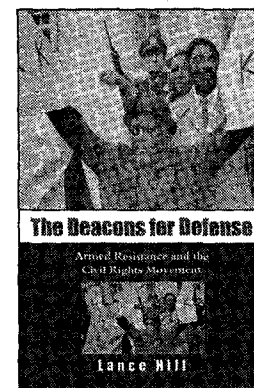


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been explored with great insight by an earlier generation of historians, many of them German-Jewish émigrés such as Fritz Stern, Georg Mosse and Peter Gay. But it does warrant a new look in our age of “culture wars” and the “clash of civilizations.” Even if *Kultur* in the sense of apolitical high culture played a greater role in Germany than anywhere else, making the country’s road to modernity unique in some respects (the so-called *Sonderweg*, or special path), recent historiography has done much to puncture the narrative of German exceptionalism. Culture has served as a substitute for politics in other countries as well: to a certain extent in France after the military defeat of 1871, in Spain after the Spanish-American War of 1898, even in the United States during the post-Vietnam culture wars. Lepenies, a distinguished sociologist, former rector of the Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg and an accomplished man of letters, offers us a series of brilliant vignettes, studded with memorable aphorisms and observations focusing on German, French and American intellectual life across time and disciplines.

From Herder, Weimar classicism and the Romantics on, at first by default, later by choice, Germans understood themselves as a *Kulturnation*, a nation unified by high culture in the absence of a central state. Once Germany achieved unity and statehood under Bismarck in 1871, this notion of *Kultur* took on more aggressive connotations. German elites counterposed *Kultur* to French civilization, German Romanticism and its cult of inwardness to the French Enlightenment and the ideal of the *citoyen*, German manliness and moral seriousness to French decadence and frivolity. After the failure of the 1848 attempt to bring parliamentary and constitutional rule to Germany, the embrace of *Kultur* often came with the dismissal of parliamentary politics as somehow un-German, and it underlay Germans’ feelings of superiority over their Western neighbors—an attitude that would merge seamlessly with Nazi racial theory and imperial aggression. It was precisely because *Kultur* shunned the realm of politics that the cultured elites collapsed so easily and often eagerly when the Nazis staged their rule as a cultural revolution.

In his exploratory tour of the history of an idea, Lepenies takes Thomas Mann as his leading figure, a choice that makes eminent sense. However ironic his stance, Mann always understood himself to be a representative of authentic German *Kultur*. Even in American exile he did not see him-

self as a martyr like Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz or Georg Büchner, nor did he ever embrace the role of rebel like Heinrich Heine or Bertolt Brecht—cultural figures who represent that other, oppositional strain in German literature. In *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918) Mann distilled the essence of the antipolitical German *Kultur* that would shape much of the discourse of cultural conservatives after World War I. Those same conservatives would accuse Mann of treason four years

Until 1871 Germans understood themselves as a Kulturnation, a nation unified by high culture in the absence of a central state.

later, when he declared his support for the Weimar Republic in his 1922 speech “The German Republic.” In a daring though not entirely convincing argument, Mann used Novalis, prime example of Romantic inwardness, and, surprisingly, Walt Whitman to prove that Romanticism and republicanism were not irreconcilable. Lepenies, who characterizes the speech as a “remarkable outburst of republicanism on romantic ground,” remarks dryly that what critics have often described as Mann’s conversion to democracy was made possible by a sleight of hand, the substitution of political interest for inwardness. In other words, Mann had found a way to embrace democracy and cosmopolitanism without letting go of a traditional notion of German culture. When Mann published the text in English translation in 1942, he followed an American friend’s advice to drop his celebratory comments about Whitman and male bonding, which were not politically correct at a time when anti-Nazi propaganda made much of the alleged perversions (read: homosexual leanings) of Hitler and his followers. This act of self-censorship proved that, for better or worse, culture and politics are always intertwined, a lesson Mann had come to learn the hard way.

In a memorable chapter titled “German Culture At Home: A Moral Failure Turned to Intellectual Advantage,” Lepenies conjures up the intense cultural flowering in the brief transitional period between the fall of the Third Reich and the foundation of the two German states in 1949. It was a time in which a vital theater and musical culture emerged among the ruins and new magazines were taking off, but the appetite for cultural renewal was laced with political apathy and cynicism. Theodor Adorno, who returned to Germany after the war, argued powerfully against the delusion that German culture could simply be “resur-

rected” at a time that called for a thoroughgoing questioning of culture’s complicity in the Third Reich and the Holocaust.

As Lepenies reminds us, the postwar encounter between the returning exiles and the representatives of the so-called inner emigration—those who had withdrawn into mute inwardness, seeking consolation in traditional notions of German culture rather than resisting the Nazi regime politically—was conflicted and resentful. Some of the inner emigrants had the gall to accuse the exiles, particularly Thomas Mann, of having watched Germany suffering during the Allied bombing campaign from the luxury and safe distance of their homes abroad. This public

denunciation reinforced Mann’s reluctance to move back to Germany. Another source of tension between the returning exiles and the inner emigrants concerned the nature and extent of German responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi state. In 1946 philosopher Karl Jaspers, who had stayed in Germany during the war, argued against the thesis of collective responsibility and called for legal prosecution of the perpetrators, while his student Hannah Arendt, who had been exiled during the war, claimed that Nazi crimes were so enormous, and responsibility so widely shared, that they exceeded the realm of any legal prosecution.

But the “moral failure” Lepenies primarily has in mind is exemplified by Friedrich Meinecke, who in his widely discussed and influential book *The German Catastrophe* claimed that Nazism had been imposed on the Germans from the outside and that salvation lay in an intensified development of German inwardness without regard to denazification and re-education. The solution to Germany’s problems, he suggested, lay in the creation of Goethe communities across the Fatherland. Absurd as this was, Meinecke’s proposal revealed that German *Kultur*, in the minds of many, had survived the war and could now be deployed to forget the atrocities committed and benefits reaped by the Germans and not just by the Nazi regime. In Lepenies’s pithy formulation, “Meinecke’s book became a symbol of the German catastrophe it claimed to analyze.” As Arendt, Jaspers and Adorno all observed, culture, once surgically separated from politics, provided an escape from reality in the immediate postwar years—as well as a flight from responsibility, from feelings of guilt and shame.

What Adorno called “the resurrection of culture,” nurtured between 1945 and 1949 especially but not only by the self-serving inner emigration, is what Lepenies

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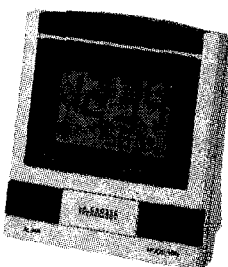
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calls "a moral failure turned to intellectual advantage." But was it an advantage? Wasn't it rather just another chapter in the seduction of culture in German history, with both exiles and émigrés once again giving too much weight to culture at the expense of politics, and thus setting the stage for the 1950s? For the decade of West Germany's "economic miracle" was a time in which intellectuals still lived off the separation of culture from politics, shunning any ideology, fascist or communist, under the protective mantle of cold war anti-totalitarianism. One wishes that Lepenies had written another chapter on what the cold war did to German notions of *Kultur*, how it restored much-maligned Modernism and "degenerate art" to West Germany, while anti-Modernism and socialist notions of classicism and realism, the so-called bourgeois heritage, ruled in East Germany. It seems that *Kultur* survived longer in the Stalinist East than in the capitalist West.

Lepenies might also have offered a more probing treatment of the German-Jewish intellectuals who embraced Goethe, the Enlightenment and secular humanism as a counterweight to the political pressures that since the late nineteenth century had increasingly marginalized Jews in the national state. I don't think that their

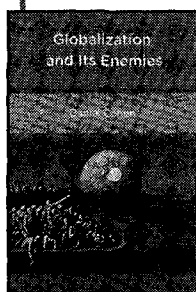
common attraction to *Kultur* makes these groups resemble each other quite as much as Lepenies suggests. On the contrary, the German appeal to *Kultur* tended to exclude the seminal German-Jewish poet and writer Heine as un-German (despite his conversion to Christianity), a trend that prefigured the Nazi campaign against "degenerate" Modernism.

Certainly, Lepenies is right to say that the traditional notion of German *Kultur* re-emerged in the immediate post-World War II period. The retreat into cultural identity after military defeat is understandable, and by no means confined to the German experience. Politics of whatever kind—fascist, communist, democratic—had become deeply suspect. But Lepenies goes further, claiming that nowhere did the seduction of culture survive to the same degree as in Germany, "though now in considerably weaker form."

This is where we part company. In public debate Germans may still focus more on literary, philosophical and artistic figures than Americans do. After all, there are no founding fathers to celebrate, no Lincoln, no Roosevelt. But the aura of *Kultur*—which rested on its opposition to the West, its hostility to mass culture, its anti-

Enlightenment and often banal Romantic ideology, its celebration of inwardness and classical music—has waned dramatically since West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's program of "Westintegration" in the 1950s. And with the cultural upheaval of the sixties, nationalist German opposition to the West all but disappeared, apart from some expressions of anti-Americanism that are not peculiar to Germany. Indeed, the death knell for the older idea of German *Kultur* was sounded when the young people embraced American rock and roll, pop, jazz and the movies. Even as young Germans turned increasingly against US policy in Vietnam and throughout the Third World, they drew their lessons in civil disobedience from American protest movements and never once turned back to national *Kultur*. Alternative German traditions (German Jacobins, the 48ers, the left Weimar avant-garde) were rediscovered, and a new and no longer nationally bound understanding of culture and politics emerged that shaped a left-liberal consensus dominant in German intellectual life until 1989 and beyond.

The unification of 1990 may have led to a stronger appreciation of German classics like Goethe and Thomas Mann,

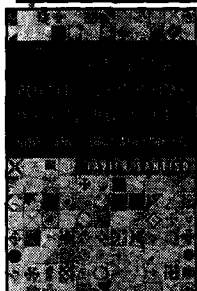


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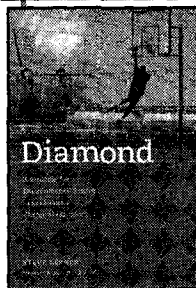
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but this revival, *pace* Lepenies, is in the mode of cultural preservation and identity that one finds in other European countries, rather than a reassertion of cultural exceptionalism, much less supremacy. In today's Germany, high and low culture no longer stand in a vertical hierarchical relationship but in a horizontal live-and-let-live one. No young German today would march to war with Hölderlin's poetry in his knapsack or identify with Faust, as earlier generations did. Postwar Germans are overwhelmingly seduced by Mephisto's offer of the material good life, finding little echo of their experience in Faust's metaphysical lament about the two irreconcilable souls in his breast. The Third Reich and Auschwitz continue to weigh heavily in united Germany, but the debates about Holocaust memory and its articulations in literature (Martin Walser, W.G. Sebald), the visual arts (Anselm Kiefer) and architecture (Daniel Libeskind, Peter Eisenman) that shake the German public sphere anew every few years are no more cultural than they are political. That *Kultur* in its traditional sense has lost its appeal is one of the consequences of the Third Reich.

But it is especially the broader idea of the war of cultures that interests Lepenies. The idea of civilizational clash is not original to Samuel Huntington but appears as early as 1927, in Julien Benda's pamphlet "The Treason of the Intellectuals," which described the 1812–13 Prussian war of liberation against Napoleon as a *guerre des cultures*. Indeed, culture wars always involve treason: treason of intellectual truth for political advantage. Benda chastised German intellectuals for embracing nationalist ideology rather than fighting for universalist values, and he warned against the dangers of German Romantic and relativist influences in France. Politically and intellectually, the 1812–13 war against French military, political and cultural hegemony fed German hostility to France, to revolution and to the Enlightenment. Here was the root of that infamous 1914 manifesto defending Kaiser and Reich and underwritten by almost 100 well-known German intellectuals—a document of "autistic arrogance," in Fritz Stern's words. By 1914 culture war had become a permanent fixture, with bloody consequences in the relations between France and Germany.

Benda's polemic found an unlikely sequel sixty years later in the United States. Indeed, for American readers the most fascinating and deeply ironic chapter in Lepenies's book will doubtless be the one on the American culture wars of the 1980s. The

Reagan revolution wanted to turn back the clock on the changes of culture and lifestyle that had spread throughout the United States since the 1960s. Conservatives fretted about how to get the paste back into the tube and how to reassert a basic sense of the opposition of good and evil. In his 1987 bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom took Reagan's "evil empire" approach to the Soviet Union as a call to cultural arms. In retrospect, Bloom's book—more symptom than accurate analysis, as Lepenies says—reads like a cultural prelude to the neoconservative political doctrines of today. Bloom, a student of

neoconservatism's German godfather, Leo Strauss, warned that American cultural standards had declined because of a sinister "German Connection," an allusion to the postwar invasion of German thought in US universities. "To the dismay of Bloom," Lepenies writes, "not only the defeated Germans but also the victorious Americans underwent a reeducation program after the Second World War." German Romanticism, relativism and nihilism had allegedly destroyed the classical humanist and universalist basis of American rational thought. The old canard of German irrationalism being irreconcilably opposed to

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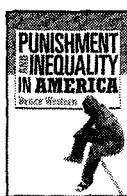
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Western rationalism had its last flight of fancy. Bloom's culprits were not only Nietzsche and Heidegger and their French descendants like Derrida but also, implausibly, rationalists like Marx, Weber and Freud—even Thomas Mann, whom Bloom improbably characterized as a proponent of (homo)sexual liberation.

For Bloom, German culture was a system of thought and belief that did not travel, exactly what German cultural conservatives had always claimed before German armies took to the road. In fact, German culture has traveled well, and for good reason. German philosophy, political economy, psychoanalysis and sociology influenced scholars and writers throughout the world not because they were German but because they provided crucial insights into the contradictions, seductions and stresses of Western modernity. They nurtured critical self-reflection of enlightened modernity, something as necessary today as it was 100 years ago. This is where cultural and political analysis still has to begin to avoid the treason of the intellect that invariably follows when *Kultur* is held to trump politics or when politics is staged as culture in some fundamentalist form.

Lepénies's reflections on French-German and American-German culture wars suggest that cultural interpretation is as much a part of the social world as any social or political fact. Indeed, his history of an idea is not just "an ornament on the building of social and political history," as he says somewhat too defensively. It contains important political lessons for both Europe and the United States. The substitution of culture for politics is a dangerous road to travel. After the failure of the constitutional vote in France and the Netherlands, Europeans are in danger of deluding themselves that European cultural identity can compensate for the absence of a European Constitution or a European foreign policy. Turkey and Islamic immigration are increasingly identified as the cultural enemy. But the dangers are much more real in the United States. The intense focus on cultural issues like sex in the movies, evolution and creationism, even academic curriculums, distracts from the hollowing out of constitutional checks and balances, the dismantling of international law and domestic threats to civil rights. Even more ominous, the "war on terror" and the "march of democracy" have increasingly taken on shadings of a war of cultures. As German historian Heinrich von Treitschke argued more than a century ago, once war becomes war of cultures, there is no end to it. ■

The Sheltering Shy

DAVID THOMSON

UNTOLD STORIES. By Alan Bennett. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 658 pp. \$32.50.

Seventy-two this year, Alan Bennett has outlasted his companions from the comedy troupe *Beyond the Fringe*. No, I do not mean that Dr. Jonathan Miller is dead. But just as Miller was prodigious when young, so he has calmed down lately. He was not just the most chillingly coherent of the four, not just a director of theater, opera and film, not just a doctor capable of doing a brisk television tour of *The Body*. It seemed only a matter of time before the BBC asked him to be prime minister for a week, as a way of explaining that tricky job—or God. As for the other two, Dudley Moore and Peter Cook, they are gone, as if death were the price of their extra fame and sexual luster. After all, Cook was beautiful in a satanic kind of way, while Moore was married to Tuesday Weld, Susan Anton and nearly every other stunning blonde in California.

Which leaves the fourth man, a phrase that in England is foggy with subtext (usually involving homosexuality and espionage), and why not? For Bennett is still the most recessive of the quartet that went *Beyond the Fringe*. Or do I mean the one with the most to hide? He was boyish still, with a National Service haircut in the '60s—he could have been a Latvian spy with a perfect Leeds accent. In *Untold Stories*, he confesses with exactly the crushed ego that distinguishes him that at least two well-meaning fans of *Beyond the Fringe*—the writer Edmund White and Prime Minister Harold Wilson—have asked whether he was actually one of the original group. Which is a way of saying that Bennett was not only the least likely satirist but by far the most reticent of the four, the one who sat there as dumb as a sofa when a magnificence like Elizabeth Taylor elected to perch on his lap.

No matter. There are defeats that deepen the soul and quietly whisper to an austere timid Yorkshire lad (the other three were more or less Londoners) that fate has something else up its sleeve for him. And so it has proved. What that thing is remains hard to define and harder still to grasp in America,

because Alan Bennett "at home" is now regarded as a national treasure by many of the classes most readily lampooned by *Beyond the Fringe*. I mean the people he writes about best: the country people; the provincials; the widowed conservatives; the stranded gentry or gentility who remember county borders, cathedral cities and cricket grounds; the ones who know Milton, Tennyson, A.A. Milne and Larkin by heart; radio listeners; the old English who feel forgotten by progress and Blairism; the lonely; the victims and even their killers; the people afflicted still by shyness and the lifelong search for some love or comfort that will not be mocked by those blithe scummy media Brits; the ones having it so good and so often that they wouldn't notice if they were being served beef tenderloin or uncooked human flesh.

What has emerged is that Alan Bennett was meant to be a writer, albeit a late bloomer. True, England boasts classier literary names—Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes, Martin Amis and so on, all the way to the latest Nobel, Harold Pinter. But it is about time that someone pointed out how reading those blokes is like bitter small talk with a stranger in a bus queue in the rain, whereas Bennett is a full lunch and high tea afterward. It is a glaring example of modern English frivolity, I think, that he is not simply regarded—with awe and terror—as one of the greatest living English writers, and a man whose nose for solitude and its thoughts is so unforgiving that sooner or later he will frighten the life out of you, especially if you cling to the belief that he is an "entertainer."

Bennett may still be regarded as principally a dramatic writer—of stage plays and scripts for film and television—but *Untold Stories* settles on a more personal prose voice. Indeed, this is the second "compendium" volume that Bennett has produced. In his introduction he compares *Untold Stories* with those annual Christmas comic books he loved as a kid. Tread carefully with that comparison and

David Thomson is the author of The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood, The New Biographical Dictionary of Film and a book on Nicole Kidman, to be published in September (all from Knopf).



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with his further suggestion of many different things "jumbled together," as in an anthology. Do not fall for the notion that this is youthful reading or even "no less serious because it is funny." The American publisher repeats that in its blurb, anxious to have Bennett purchased for his comedy. And it's not that he's not funny. But the comedy is so often gallows humor, or like tap-dancing in a cancer ward.

The publisher should strain less. The first volume of this kind, *Writing Home*, was published in London in 1994 and became a huge bestseller in Britain. It was a collection of pieces: on Bennett's early life in Yorkshire, on close friends, on films and plays he had been involved with, on books and authors. But the two dominating items were about 200 pages of diary extracts from 1980 to 1995 and a forty-page memoir, "The Lady in the Van," an account of how an indigent but fierce old lady, Miss Shepherd, took root in Bennett's front garden in Camden Town, intimidated him, seduced him (in the way of a victim seeking a benefactor) and came to dominate his life as a lover or a parent might have done.

"The Lady in the Van" was often very funny, in terms of the clash of misunderstandings and the living theater of embarrassment, and Bennett's friend Maggie Smith played the part when the strange episode was transferred to the stage. But many writers and Camden Townites would not have tolerated the embarrassment. Bennett went along with it for deep-seated reasons, undoubtedly including a kind of guilt or deference that exceeds the ordinary liberal weakness for charitable cases; a social masochism that comes from not wishing to be bold; and a profound interest in and identification with the distressed, the lost, the deranged and the alone. Most people would have had Miss Shepherd removed, or moved on. Bennett let her linger, as if he somehow reckoned he deserved her. She became a problem visitor, yet this tolerance was accompanied in his diaries by an increasing horror at the spite, the triviality and mercenariness of "successful" England. There's not much doubt that Bennett is an old Labour voter by instinct, but do not mistake him for a cheerful progressive. Deep in his heart, he is as conservative as his lower-middle-class Mam and Dad from Leeds. That unexpected political nostalgia may have helped make *Writing Home* a bestseller, but it has also led Bennett away from London modishness and toward a universal fear of lost traditions and surrendered codes of silent honor.

The set pieces in *Untold Stories* are, again, the diaries—this time from 1996 to 2004, the years of Blair, the era of ultimate betrayal and chagrin for an old socialist. In "An Average Rock Bun" Bennett offers an account of his struggle with bowel cancer (the title refers to its size) in which he is given a fifty-fifty chance. Once he has come through, he is told the real odds were closer to one in five that he'd survive. And then there is "Untold Stories" itself, a memoir of about 120 pages, the opener to this collection and the most Chekhovian piece Bennett has ever written.

It begins with Alan and his father being interviewed by a doctor who is looking into Mam's depression. This is 1966, and Mam, the capable, hitherto cheerful wife and mother of two sons, is becoming more solitary and sad. Yet she is Alan's Mam still, nothing like the prima donna Miss Shepherd, a woman who was always crying out for the stage. As for Lilian Bennett, "in all her excursions into unreality Mam remained the shy, unassuming woman she had always been, none of her fantasies extravagant, her claims, however irrational they might be, always modest. She might be ill, disturbed, mad even, but she still knew her place." That is essential Bennett, both blessing and damnation, and it is not just a first attempt to define his central shyness but a troubled rumination over whether shyness is proper or a form of madness that requires cleansing outburst or outrage.

The doctor asks the father and son if there is a history of depression in the family. Alan automatically answers; after all, he is the educated one, an Oxford graduate, not to mention a stage success, while Dad was never more than a long-suffering butcher. So Alan says, No, none at all. But he hears Dad sigh and feels Dad's hand on his knee—this from a father who has rarely touched him. There was Mam's dad, it turns out now. Alan has never heard word one about this, but in 1925, it seems, his own granddad Peel, out of the blue, drowned himself in the canal.

That is the setup for a family memoir from an escaped son—after all, Alan has far outstripped the limits of his family life—but from a writer who cannot shake off the ties and bonds of family, and maybe from an artist who has puzzled over the sources of his own melancholy. Bennett is as good as anyone I have ever read on how this private shyness (the emotional) is inseparable from the English burden of knowing and keeping your own place (political). Put the two together and you have the tormented world of secret lives, where it can take forty years or

more for a suicide to be disclosed.

Read this and judge whether any functioning English novelist of today knows as much:

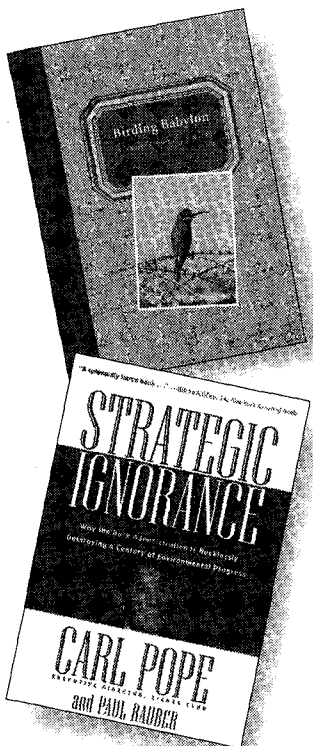
Shyness (which will keep cropping up in this book) is a soft word, foggy and woolen, and it throws its blanket over all sorts of behaviour. It covers a middle-aged son or neurasthenic daughter living at home with an elderly mother, through to some socially crippled and potentially dangerous creature incapable of human response; shy a spectrum that stretches from the wallflower to the psychopath. 'A bit of a loner' is how the tabloids put it after some shrinking wreck has ventured to approach or make off with a child or exposed himself in a park, 'shy' thought altogether too kindly a description. Because 'soft' comes near it, and 'timid', too, but without the compassion or understanding implicit in shy. That he or she is shy is an excuse or an extenuation that is made by others (mothers in particular) but seldom by the persons concerned. Because if you are shy then you're generally too shy to say so, 'I'm shy' a pretty bold thing to come out with.

Sheltering under shy, it was a long time before I understood that the self-effacing and the self-promoting, shy and its opposite, share a basic assumption, shy and forward the same. Everybody is looking at me, thinks the shy person (and I wish they weren't). Everybody is looking at me, thinks the self-confident (and quite right too).

This is the remorseless, probing voice (in which it is impossible not to hear the plangent Yorkshireness of Bennett himself, plaintive, naggy, yet hard) in a memoir that watches over Mam's slow death while wondering why granddad drowned himself in the canal, and while knowing at the heart of it all that Alan's own state has to be reckoned with. For just as the above extract indicates, Bennett has come to the realization that there may be a tyrant, a monster—or at the very least a demanding actor—inside that shy soul who does such a good impression of wanting to vanish that it can make people laugh or cry. Hence the abiding hope that Alan Bennett may be merely a funny man, one of those North Country comics who looks so glum the audience starts giggling.

Of course, "Untold Stories" is ostensibly an elegy for Mam, and the kindness of the narrative voice, or the compassion, is all the greater now in that, at 70, Bennett is in full realization of how the stifling, touchless community of his own family

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built "shyness" in himself. There might be excuse for anger or complaint—there is that need for outrage in the shy once their shackles fall off. They need to seize on mania, or violence, and one version of that is killing the parents. But Alan watches Mam die in the hushed passion of a Lear testing Cordelia for breath:

Once her speech has unravelled, any further deterioration in her personality becomes hard for an onlooker to gauge (and we are all onlookers). Speechless and seemingly beyond reach, she dozes in the first-floor bedroom to the house above the bay, regularly fed and watered, her hair done every fortnight, oblivious of place and time and touch. In the other beds women come and go, or come and die, my mother outlasting them all. On the horizon ships pass and it is as if her own vessel, having sailed, now lies becalmed, anchored on its horizon, life suspended, death waiting and in the meantime nothing: life holds her in its slack jaw and seems to doze.

How can I convey the advance Bennett has made in this book by discarding an earlier tendency to self-pity and reaching for a sublime generosity? Well, let me bring into adjacency Joan Didion's recent *The Year of Magical Thinking*. I must begin by saying that I have probably read and reread Bennett and Didion as much as any authors. You will know the legend, that Didion's book is about the death of her husband, the writer John Gregory Dunne. So it is, but in an awkward way that has not been much noticed. For whereas Didion has for years adopted many of the manners of a shy writer, above all in testing the texture of her feelings, their veracity, rather more than in having them, so the obituary book tells us little about Dunne, and far too little about what he meant to Didion. It is a book about the person left, and I think it's wrong for close reading to leave out of account how much liberation or exultation there is in that person who has become the center of attention, the mistress of the stage. (Didion has consented to a stage adaptation of the book, with David Hare directing.)

The Year of Magical Thinking may well have been a necessary book for its author, but that pursuit of self does not shut out glimpses of authorial triumph, and even an oblique efficiency. Yet in Bennett's account of Mam's death there exists side by side a tender description of her and just as detailed and poignant an account of how her parentage and his family set Alan—

their pride, their joy, their reason—back in the gloomy shelter called shyness.

I have a hunch where this insight has come from. I said earlier that Bennett is a dramatist (though he admits that he finds drama hard). As such, he is often interesting—witness *The Madness of George III*, an unexpected defense of monarchy, illness and the enforced isolation of the old and infirm; and *A Question of Attribution*, a witty television film in which the current Queen (thanks to Prunella Scales) appeared on the Palace stage with Sir Anthony Blunt, spy, homosexual, aesthete, lonely fellow and Keeper of the Queen's Pictures. Their talk is Bennett at his best—all polite form, with hidden meanings and masked enmity lurking in patient, or familial, silence. But that talk also offered the suggestion that Bennett the dramatist is handicapped by the very modesty that dogged Mam and the rest of the discreet family, the same fear of open conflict, violent argument and contentiousness. All of those things are anathema to the English family life, pleasant but secret, that Bennett knew and that has struck other authors (Greene, le Carré) as a metaphor for espionage.

In one of Bennett's best dramatic works, "I didn't say anything" is a key line delivered with a sigh and a pause (by Bennett himself) as if to make a claim for the tirade that has been smothered. This comes from "A Chip in the Sugar," one of the first series of "Talking Heads," monologues or colloquies between a deserted figure and a fond, uncritical camera. The slight undertone of natter or whine in Bennett proves to be grievance talking to itself. In "A Chip in the Sugar," Graham is a 40-ish son who looks after an elderly Mam. She is flirty and adventurous; he is pessimistic and cautious. She embarks on a late romance; he advises against it—but chiefly because he, the caregiver, may be abandoned. Of course, he knows best, but Mam is willful, so he says, "I didn't say anything" with the silent volumes being quietly dumped in our lap. But are we really an audience, or a surrogate for the crowd that could drive the Grahams of the world crackers? The suspicion dawns as the "story" unfolds that the monologist is not just unreliable but closer to the brink than Mam.

This artful form (graced by such skilled players as Maggie Smith, Thora Hird, Patricia Routledge and Bennett) acted like a revelation to Bennett. He loved the calm of interior monologue, the wistful dread; but he was capable of adding hints or in-

nuendo that made us wary of the lecturing voice. It was a perfect medium for him, and done as television or, even better, as radio, where the sense of privacy is enhanced by not having to look at faces, the "Talking Heads" are classics. But the series also drew out the tendency toward paranoia in those living alone, that creepy feeling of being watched. Now we learn that Bennett's mother had the same worry—it's the fate of the net-curtain class: that they may be spied upon as they spy on others.

In those first "Talking Heads" (made in 1988), a furtive rebellion is emerging in the shy: above all in the vicar's wife, played by Maggie Smith, who finds sexual splendor with an Indian shopkeeper. But others are cracking up, and imagining or suffering the scrutiny of strangers—from neighbors or the social services, an aspect of England for which Bennett has little hope or faith. In the second "Talking Heads," the mood is far more bleak. For here Bennett shifts over to the side of outlaws and criminals—in one case a pederast. It is a sign, I think, first presaged in his taking the side of the spies Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt, that this shy bystander could turn nasty, angry and even outrageous in ways that make the angry young men of his youth seem callow.

I have left out plenty in what is a packed suitcase of a book, not least Bennett's biting observations on the English. These diaries find him rankled by evidence of public unkindness, yet they have a cruelty of their own. In 1999 he wrote:

16 April. Foul young businessman on the train making arrangements for the evening with a girlfriend via his mobile phone. 'Save some for me,' he says, and as he signs off: 'Be kissed.'

There speaks a boy and a young man who tells us he hardly knew how to kiss. (It is another breakthrough in this volume that Alan fesses up to a male companion. For decades, I think, most readers supposed he was gay—not the right word—but still it was hard for Bennett himself to admit any reason for saying so.) But the startling thing in that diary entry, and the warning that shy people may make great killers, is the unaffected use of the word "foul." If you want to understand the cultural wars in England now, and if you want to come to grips with a great writer and a challenging mind, then Bennett is your man. But understand that he feels he was wrongfully imprisoned for most of his life. He has an edge or an open blade in his raincoat pocket, and it is raw and needy, like stomach trouble. ■



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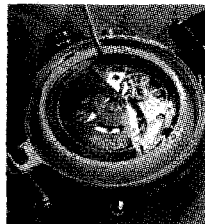
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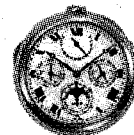


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Dining With Devils

FATIN ABBAS

YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN: A Memoir.

By Wole Soyinka. Random House. 499 pp. \$26.95.

In 1964, in Ibadan, Nigeria, a young playwright named Wole Soyinka founded Orisun Theatre, a group that specialized in semi-improvised satirical sketches on the country's political situation. There was no shortage of material for satire: Only four years into its independence from Britain, Nigeria was already

in the grip of a corrupt government that was trying to establish itself as a one-party "democracy." But theater in Nigeria—especially political satire of the kind that distinguished Orisun Theatre—was a risky business. As Soyinka recounts in his memoir *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, the group's players were often set upon by progovernment members of the audience and by the police, and performances became so rife with violence that the group had to be trained in self-defense tactics.

The experience of Orisun Theatre opens a window onto the intimate and complex relationship between art and politics in Africa. In a continent of rampant and often brutal political oppression, artists have almost no choice but to address politics, whether they like it or not. Yet this very involvement renders them vulnerable to the violence of the state. This is especially true for writers, whose medium is language and whose powers of advocacy, therefore, pose a particular threat to autocracy. While modern African writers began writing in the shadow of, and often in response to, colonialism, independence posed its own dilemmas. In much of Africa independence did not, as had been hoped, herald a new age of liberation and endless opportunity. The faraway colonial enemy was simply replaced by a near enemy, the African dictator. Thus many African writers found themselves living under conditions that were so repressive that the act of writing itself inevitably became a politically charged—and dangerous—activity. Writers such as the Guinean Camara Laye, the Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Cameroonian René Philombe, among many others, have been censored, harassed and even imprisoned because of their work.

Political oppression not only threatened the writer's freedom of expression; it also hindered the audience's ability to read.

The social and economic conditions that denied many Africans access to literature and even to literacy were often the direct result of the corruption and greed of the autocratic regimes that came to power after independence. Given the extent to which politics impinged on both their writing and their audience, withdrawal into an ivory tower of art became morally impossible for many African writers. Creating art was not enough; they also had to fight for the conditions on which art depends for its survival.

One of Africa's most renowned writers, Soyinka has wrestled throughout his career with the dilemmas confronted by the African writer. *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* provides a captivating, close-up depiction of those dilemmas, and of Soyinka's own response to them. Faced with brutal political injustice in his native Nigeria, a country that has been under various military dictatorships for most of its forty-six-year history as an independent nation, Soyinka was repeatedly forced to assume the role of political activist. But political activism raised its own quandaries: How was the artist to plunge into politics yet also keep his hands clean of the very corruption and moral compromises against which he fought?

Soyinka was born in 1934 in Abeokuta in southwestern Nigeria, then a British colony. His 1981 memoir *Aké* paints a lyrical picture of the world of his childhood, where the traditional beliefs of his indigenous Yoruba culture mingled with his parents' deep Christian faith. Early on he set his mind on a career as a playwright and began writing seriously as a university student in England in the 1950s. He returned to Nigeria in 1960; over the course of the next decades he taught at various universities in Nigeria and abroad, and continued to publish plays, novels, memoirs and poetry. His work, particularly his plays, soon won him international attention, and in 1986 he became the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Soyinka's accomplishment as a creative

writer lies largely in his innovative fusion of Western ideas and art forms with the cosmology and traditions of his indigenous culture. Thus his 1963 play *The Strong Breed* ties a purification rite of the Niger Delta to the Christian Passion. His 1973 play *The Bacchae of Euripides* fuses motifs from Greek and Yoruba mythology. *Opera Wonyosi*, his 1981 play, transposes Bertolt Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* to an African setting. While not as highly regarded as his plays, his novels and his poetry also reflect this eclectic mélange of Western and indigenous forms. In his work Soyinka often engages directly with issues of power, corruption and oppression; it is a testament to his skill as a writer that he avoids didacticism. A prolific creative writer, he has also published many works of nonfiction, including memoirs, literary criticism and political commentary.

Spanning his days as a student in England in the 1950s to his recent misadventures with the Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* is much more than a memoir. It is also the chronicle of a nation's history, encompassing all the milestones in Nigeria's turbulent past—from its first elections, which were rigged by the British in order to put power in the hands of the conservative north; to the first bloody military coups of 1966; to the Biafran Civil War of 1967–70, which pitted eastern secessionists against the north; to the 1993 presidential elections, whose rightful victor, M.K.O. Abiola, was promptly jailed after Abacha's 1993 coup d'état.

Over the forty or so years that the memoir charts, Soyinka's relationship to both his art and his politics underwent drastic changes. As a young man Soyinka had great faith in the artist's ability to inspire political and social transformation through his work. He writes that he first resolved to use his art in a politically conscious way after being disillusioned with the Nigerian nationalists he met in England in the 1950s, the very nationalists who were then being groomed to lead independent Nigeria after the departure of the British. The ardent fervor with which Soyinka and his fellow students initially ran to greet their nation's designated liberators quickly turned into dismay. The nationalists were pretentious and shallow, disdainful toward the very people they were supposed to represent. "Their version of the message of the committed minority... was, 'Come back quickly and stake your claims. The earlier you position yourselves, the bigger your slice of the national cake!'" It soon became clear

Fatin Abbas is a doctoral candidate in comparative literature at Harvard.

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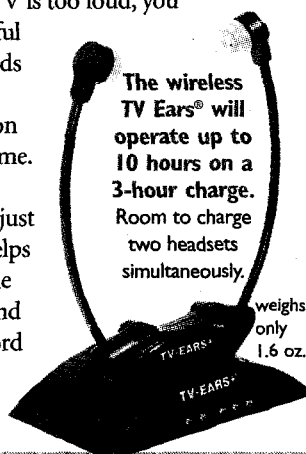
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to the young Soyinka that these were not to be “the transforming agents...in a process of liberation” but merely the “flamboyant replacements of the old colonial order.”

Upon returning to Nigeria in 1960, therefore, Soyinka began to develop his art as a means to “propagate progressive ideas, mobilize the people, and expose their [new] betrayers.” His chosen medium—drama—was effective in this respect, since it was performed live in front of audiences to which a Nigerian novelist would not have had access. Almost immediately after his return, he infuriated the new ruling elite when the run of his play *A Dance of the Forests* overlapped with the country’s independence

The creation of art, no matter how subversive, no longer satisfied Soyinka’s hunger for direct, meaningful action. So when he was informed one day that the NNDP was planning to announce the results of the stolen elections on the radio that evening, thereby making them official, he decided to take matters into his own hands. That night, in the city of Ibadan, he held up at gunpoint the station that was to broadcast the announcement, and made the station’s duty officers replace the tape announcing the results with his own tape, which called on the NNDP to drop its stolen mandate, leave town and take its reprobates with it. This extraordinarily daring act placed Soyinka,



Wole Soyinka at home in Ibadan in 1969, a week after his release from jail

celebrations that year. The play was eerily prescient in its depiction of the corruption of postcolonial Nigerian politics.

Soon, however, Soyinka came up against the limitations of art as a tool of political and social transformation. In 1965 the regional elections in Soyinka’s western region were rigged, taking away power from the elected party and giving it to the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), an ally of the corrupt federal government controlled by the north. The electoral crisis marked a turning point for Soyinka. He writes that the crisis,

with its lack of alternatives, informed me with a quiet certitude that I was finally tired of dramatic sketches that, however scabrous, drew only symbolic blood from the veins of Power. Suddenly, that language of intervention...became inadequate, even self-indulgent.

who had already made a name for himself in Nigeria and abroad as a playwright, at the forefront of the country’s opposition movement.

From then on, he would be drawn time and again into the country’s and the continent’s political turmoil. In rich, vivid prose, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* depicts these numerous political entanglements: His attempt, when civil war erupted between Biafran secessionists and the government in 1967, to create a bipartisan “Third Force” that would bring an end to the conflict; his efforts, along with the writers Chinua Achebe and John Pepper Bekeremo-Clark, to intervene on behalf of a general unjustly accused of treason and sentenced to death by the dictator Ibrahim Babangida; his struggle, during the first unstable days of postapartheid South Africa, to engineer a meeting between Nelson Man-

delá and his political rival Mongosuthu Buthelezi, chief of the KwaZulu nation; his endeavor, in the first year of Abacha’s reign, to organize a million-man march to protest the dictator. Alas, Soyinka’s efforts were not always successful, and sometimes he paid dearly for them. He spent almost two and a half years in prison for the stance he took during the Biafran Civil War, a detention that would become the subject of his 1972 memoir *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*. Nonetheless, his growing international fame as a writer and persecuted dissident also enhanced his clout, affording him privileges enjoyed by few other Nigerians. His signature Afro—which grew ever more distinctive as it turned white with age—was recognized everywhere he went. In one episode in the book, he describes making his way through a string of impenetrable roadblocks during riots in the capital Lagos simply by sticking his head out of the car window. At the roadblocks, he would immediately be recognized by the attending guards and ushered through.

Soyinka’s memoir makes clear why a writer in his position could not simply stand on the sidelines in the great battles of postindependence Africa. Yet the book also suggests the perils to a writer’s integrity of involvement in the dubious world of politics, particularly the moral gray zone created by dictatorships. As Soyinka admits, to be both politically effective and ethical is not always an easy balance to strike. As he puts it, “A public cause, a clamorous need, sometimes imposes choices that appear, on the surface, to contradict one’s democratic convictions and, indeed, lifelong pursuits.” For Soyinka, as for any other activist facing similar challenges, it was ultimately a question of the extent to which the ends justified the means. Thus, he sometimes found himself confronted with the dilemma of whether to collaborate with the very dictators he denounced—a phenomenon he characterizes as “dining with the devil.” While harassed by many of Nigeria’s dictators, Soyinka was also courted by some, mainly those who sought to improve their PR image through association with him. Under certain circumstances, Soyinka found cooperation justifiable. In one of the more humorous episodes in this memoir, he recalls working with the military head of state Olusegun Obasanjo to steal back an ancestral bronze head of a Yoruba deity that had been stolen decades earlier by a German archeologist. With Obasanjo’s blessing, Soyinka traveled to Brazil and

managed to smuggle out the mask from the private collection of an art collector, only to discover later that the mask was not the real thing but a cheap replica of the original—itsself securely ensconced within the Museum of Mankind in London.

If “dining with the devil” posed one ethical dilemma for Soyinka, the question of armed struggle against Nigeria’s dictatorship posed another. “I had wrestled intermittently with the problem of violence,” he writes. “To be caught up in a violent situation, compelled to respond to it, presents no agonizing choice; to initiate one is another matter.” He had been compelled to use violence—or at least the threat of it—during the electoral crisis in the western region, when he had held up the radio station in Ibadan. But Soyinka only seriously considered the option of armed struggle when confronted with Abacha’s ruthless regime. From the beginning of Abacha’s reign in 1993, it was clear to Soyinka that this was one dictator with whom cooperation or collaboration, even of the most superficial kind, was beyond the pale. Abacha was, he writes, “the most repellent of the species” of dictators that had ruled Nigeria, a monstrous “human aberration” who stopped at nothing to secure his grip on power and to silence his opponents. (Among his more notorious acts was the execution, in 1995, of the writer and Ogoni rights activist Ken Saro-wiwa, who challenged the government’s cozy relationship with Shell Oil.) The enmity between Soyinka and Abacha quickly came to a head when Soyinka tried to organize a march in protest of the dictatorship, and in 1994 Soyinka was forced into exile, secretly crossing the border into Benin.

Once in exile, Soyinka gathered together Nigerian students and workers and formed the National Liberation Council of Nigeria (NALICON), which lobbied the international community against Abacha, broadcast an opposition radio program into Nigeria and worked with other dissident groups to oppose the dictatorship. Despite the efforts of NALICON and other groups, however, Abacha continued to consolidate his hold on power, jailing and assassinating his opponents. As Soyinka writes, “A monster had reduced us, collectively, to a plantation of slaves, and the word ‘liberation’ could not be restricted to being a mere rhetorical device.” As peaceful means of protest were exhausted, Soyinka decided that armed struggle was the only way that Abacha’s regime could be effectively challenged. “To concede genuine revulsion at the phenomenon of violence,” he writes, “does not, however, contradict an acceptance of its

sometime necessity—and even justice.” Yet Soyinka is quick to disavow the indiscriminate use of violence, especially at the cost of innocent lives. As it turned out, Soyinka and NALICON would not have to resort to arms; in 1998 news reached them of the sudden death of Abacha, who had suffered a heart attack in the arms of a prostitute.

As *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* amply demonstrates, Soyinka has navigated the difficult quandaries attending political involvement in Africa with admirable courage, wisdom and integrity. What the heroic self-portrait of his memoir obscures,

however, is that Soyinka’s political stances are not always praiseworthy. For example, he lauds Rwanda’s president Paul Kagame as “one of the continent’s extremely rare breed of leaders.” If anything, Kagame is all too typical of the continent’s leaders. While he helped rid Rwanda of its genocidal Hutu government in 1994, he has subsequently amassed his share of human rights atrocities, both in his own country and in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. Another example is Soyinka’s often quite hostile attitude toward Islam and Arabs. Soyinka has frequently expressed the view that Islamic civilization was as

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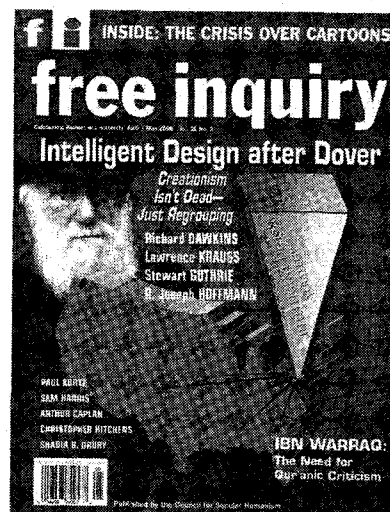
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devastating to Africa as Western colonization—a view that is questionable for many reasons, the most obvious being that the geographic reach of the Western powers in Africa was so much more extensive than the reach of Islamic civilization ever was. But Soyinka ventures into even murkier territory when he tries to define African identity on the basis of racial purity, as he did in the early 1990s during an acrimonious debate with Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan Swahili scholar of political science at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Soyinka had taken issue with the public-television series *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, which Mazrui had made in 1986, partly because of the emphasis it placed on the role of Islam in Africa. Attacking Mazrui, Soyinka charged that “*The Africans* was not a series made by a black African,” implying that because Mazrui had Arab ancestry (like a vast number of other East Africans) he was not a black, i.e., “real,” African. Soyinka repeated the charge years later, when Mazrui objected to another television series about the African continent, this one made by Soyinka’s good friend Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. This time Soyinka declared that unlike Mazrui, he and Gates were true black Africans “with no hang-ups.”

As Mazrui pointed out, in defining African identity on the basis of race, Soyinka was in effect affirming the same logic championed by racists. If Soyinka was willing to discount a Kenyan as an African because of a certain percentage of Arab blood, Mazrui argued, he might as well discount the black American civil rights leaders W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X, because of the European blood in their veins. Mazrui also observed that there may very well be an etymological link between the name of Soyinka’s own ethnic group, the Yoruba, and the Arabic adjective for Arab, “Arabiyyu,” and that one of the Yorubas’ own origin myths traced their ancestry back to Arabia and the Persian Gulf. The debate revealed one of Soyinka’s less attractive features: a narrow-mindedness that seems to be in direct contradiction to many of the democratic ideals for which he has stood.

This is not to say that *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* depicts a false picture of Soyinka. But the critical eye that he turns on others is—perhaps inevitably—seldom turned on himself. Here is yet another pitfall of political engagement: the self-mythologizing of the activist-intellectual. Still, while one may not always agree with his views, there is no doubting Soyinka’s courage in responding to the predicament of the African artist. Confronted with the

knowledge that the pen is not always mightier than the sword, Soyinka was never afraid to act upon that knowledge, or to engage directly in the fight against political injustice. “I am, contrary to all legitimately cited evidence,” Soyinka confesses, “actually a closet glutton for tranquillity. An oft-quoted remark of mine—‘Justice is the first condition of humanity’—does, however, act constantly against the fulfillment of that craving for peace.”

At first glance, the message of *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* seems to be about the impotence of art as a means of resistance and the necessity of recourse, as Soyinka

puts it, to weapons “more lethal than portable typewriter and paper.” Yet Soyinka’s most powerful weapon has always been the eloquence of his voice as a writer. This political memoir thus ironically affirms the triumph of art. For it was Soyinka’s achievement as an artist in the theater that made him a significant actor in the theater of politics, and that has earned him a lasting place in the history of African letters. Even if Soyinka’s art is not as lethal a weapon as the gun with which he held up the radio station in Ibadan, it will outlive both him and the regimes he opposed, exposing the vanities of men in power. ■

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THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ISLAND. By Michel Houellebecq. Knopf. 337 pp. \$24.95.

MAMMALS. By Pierre Mérot. Black Cat. 198 pp. \$13.

Published in France late last summer, Michel Houellebecq’s newest novel has at last landed on American shores. Although, truth be told, “novel” is a bit of a misnomer—*The Possibility of an Island* is not a novel any more than its author is a novelist. A notorious drunk, a raging misogynist, a racist, a pornographer, a provocateur, a sign of the times, Houellebecq writes treatises dressed up as fictions, with characters who seldom manage to be half as interesting as the ideas that animate them. Life in Houellebecq’s world is relentlessly despairing and bleak, punctured only by the odd moment of sexual gratification; in the cruel free market of sex under late capitalism, some are always losers. His latest work zeroes in on the degradation of the body—the aging process—with a science-fiction twist. For a few sweet years in one’s youthful prime, *Island* instructs, life is worth living; after that, it is a slow march to the grave. To wit: “In the modern world you could be a swinger, bi, trans, zoo, into S&M, but it was forbidden to be old.”

Island returns to themes Houellebecq has treated before, in *Whatever*, *The Elementary Particles*—which made him an international literary star—and *Platform*: the brutalizing nature of late capitalism; for those lucky players in the free sexual market, the distractions of sex (albeit an increasingly routinized and decreasingly satisfying distraction); and the onset of a future even more rigid and joyless than the present. It stars Daniel, a shock jock

who specializes in the most offensive and raunchiest of “comedy,” where Arabs are “Allah’s vermin” and Jews are “circumcised fleas.” He falls for Isabelle, editor of *Lolita*, a magazine for adolescents and the grown-up women who idolize them. As time passes, their sex life sours; their love follows fast behind. Daniel takes temporary comfort in young Esther—she is an accomplished pianist, but “like all very pretty young girls she was basically only good for fucking.” This star-crossed relationship dies when Daniel catches her doing the one thing she was good for with two gentlemen her own age at a drug-fueled birthday bash.

The narration alternates between chapters that take place in the present, as Daniel becomes slowly drawn into the religious cult of Elohim, patterned on the real French cult of Raëlianism, and chapters written by Daniel24 and Daniel25, subsequent clones created from Daniel’s DNA by Elohim scientists in a future sometime after an environmental disaster. (The end of *Elementary Particles* is also narrated from a posthuman future where life is reproduced asexually and all members of a species share the same DNA. This futurist orientation allows Houellebecq not only to examine our cultural preoccupation with genetics but to isolate his narrators from the present, sealing off his fictions and looking down on

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them from the all-seeing beyond.) The Daniel chapters are long-winded but tolerable; the Daniel24 and -25 chapters are unbearable pseudo-philosophical meditations on the meaning(lessness) of human life: "Intelligence permits the domination of the world; this can appear only within a social species, and through the medium of language," we are told. "Love is simple to define, but it seldom happens—in the series of beings. Through these dogs we pay homage to love, and to its possibility. What is a dog but a machine for loving?" And so on.

Subtlety is not Houellebecq's strong suit. His typical fare is spiced up with brutally graphic, predictably boring and deeply misogynistic sex; stabs at ethnic minorities, especially Muslims; rants against global capitalism and expressions of raw grief at the broken promises of the 1960s; and tirades against the veterans of May '68, who in his view shirked their responsibilities in the name of a revolution that degenerated into sheer moral permissiveness. (Houellebecquians trace this critique to his estranged mother, who abandoned her son and later married a Muslim.) He is at once violently reactionary and sentimental, a libertine and a prude.

His worldview—like that of Céline, another reactionary French misanthrope—is an apocalyptic one, in which something has irreparably cleaved humanity from its promise. It is this shadow of what was and what can no longer be that lingers, ominously, over his characters.

Whatever (published in France in 1994 as *Extension du domaine de la lutte*), Houellebecq's first, finest and shortest book, closes with this betrayal:

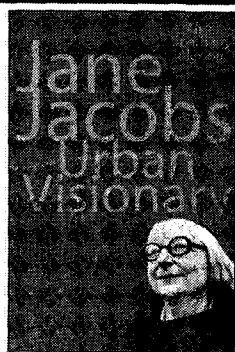
Everything which might have been a source of pleasure, of participation, of innocent sensual harmony, has become a source of suffering and unhappiness. At the same time I feel, and with impressive violence, the possibility of joy. For years I have been walking alongside a phantom who looks like me, and who lives in a theoretical paradise strictly related to the world. I've long believed that it was up to me to become one with this phantom. That's done with.... It will not take place, the sublime fusion; the goal of life is missed.

It used to be fashionable to describe Houellebecq's novels as funny. But his earlier fictions, though wry and sometimes amusing, are hardly knee-slappers—unless you count the ease with which women

submit to the sexual magnetism of characters named for our author. Neither Houellebecq's humor nor his prose stylings draw readers to him; his ideas and his ideas alone have won him an audience. Those ideas—and the fearlessly ugly manner in which he trumpets them—are by no means original to him. His bromides about globalization, immigration and feminism have aired the frustrations—indeed, the rage—of a whole segment of French society. Houellebecq didn't reinvent the indignities of daily modern life, the performance reviews and group travel tours and solo trips to the Monoprix, but no French writer before him had captured them so well. (Indeed, French literature had been something of a barren field before he burst onto the scene.) He shone a harsh light on our humiliating public lives and our mechanized private lives, and most of all, our lowered expectations of both. Like all important writers, he asked us to consider if this is the way it has to be.

Houellebecq is not alone in privileging ideas over plot, or setting, or character; from Camus and Sartre onward, the French novel of ideas has been celebrated at home and abroad, particularly in the United States. Take, for instance,

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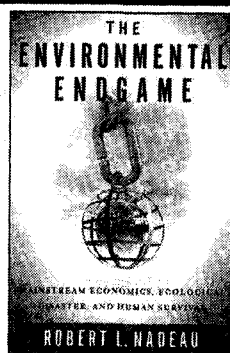
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Georges Perec's 1965 novella *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, whose target was similar to Houellebecq's. Perec's tale of a young couple, viewed with almost sociological detachment, invited readers to identify with their lust for consumption and bourgeois striving; his indictment of consumer society was sharper and more effective for its ability to quietly damn readers who felt themselves slowly eviscerated by their aching need for leather wing chairs and Swedish lamps. (Such was the case for this Swedish lamp-loving reader, at least.)

Yet in Houellebecq, we find not a portrait of our worst selves but of people distorted beyond all recognition, floating in an incomplete world, stripped of all pleasure, all friendship, hobbies, leisure and passion, any intellectual, social or emotional respite from flat despair. So long as Houellebecq sews this exaggerated vision to a political critique, it functions as more or less effective satire. But *Island*, where science-fiction fantasy retreats into a political vacuum, is unmoored from the ideas that grounded his previous fictions, and fails—as a novel and as theory. It diddles about, describing threesomes in lieu of parodying free love, bemoaning well-trod fixations instead of interrogating their conditions. It is not philosophy but polemic. And as the narrative descends further into the Elohim cult, further into itself, it becomes increasingly difficult to care what befalls any of the Daniels. Alas, the great disappointment of *Island* is that after causing so much suffering for the reader, Daniel25 does not even have the decency to die.

Houellebecq is dead; long live Houellebecq. Pierre Mérot's first book to be translated into English, *Mammals*, treats a slew of Houellebecquian themes: the degradation of modern life, the idiocy of bureaucracy, drinking. The two authors even share some of the same ideas on love—"One always ends up dying of love, or rather of the absence of love, it's inevitably fatal," the first writes in *Island*. In *Mammals* we get that self-pitying sadness, but with the rug pulled out from under it: "Some people die of being unable to love, others of being unloved. Furthermore, anyone who still believes in love—even some simple, unexceptional love—will be the first to be annihilated."

Mérot accomplishes this annihilation so skillfully, so hilariously, that devouring his slim book as quickly as possible is a reader's only recourse. His hero is a man we know only as the uncle, a 40-year-old alcoholic loser who gambols from unemployment to jobs in publishing and

teaching while committing "emotional suicide" with two different women. Love may annihilate him, but it does so over and over again. "What we resent about others is not the fact that they suffer as we do," Mérot writes early on, "but that they have found the same cure. Love is believing that the other person has found a different cure, something that might truly heal us. But most of the time, we clash with people who are just like us, whose pain is just like ours; this is why they are invincible."

Mérot uses his story of bumbling tragedy-comedy to skewer the unexamined life but also to question the idea that the examined life would be any different, any less disturbed. When the only transference seeing an analyst produces for the uncle is to move him from whiskey to beer, he concludes that "psychoanalysis teaches you one vital lesson: that seeing a psychoanalyst is pointless, that we are all responsible for sorting out our own shit." As he navigates a world that intrudes on him from all sides, pressing in with demands and also opening with moments of exhilaration, sorting the shit out is bound to be a losing proposition.

Like Houellebecq, Mérot is a man writing with other men in mind. Women figure in both their stories as problems—in the first, women are either the fresh meat that taunts aging lions or the sagging flesh that disappoints their lovers. And in *Mammals* women are mothers or potential mothers—"the unhappy passages through which we are born."

With special attention to these unhappy passages, these "worried mammals," Mérot fixates on the problem of the individual in the bizarre yet frequently occurring entity known as a family. He cites two models: One belongs to a throwaway character, Bruno Michel, who just happens to combine the names of Houellebecq's main characters in *Elementary Particles* and who, like Houellebecq, just happens to have been abandoned by his mother. (In an especially funny touch, one of Bruno's "most inspirational epigrams" is his screaming of "I despise you! I despise you!") The second model, the uncle's, is a "life sentence," served under a parent who "wields absolute control over every member of the family." The uncle's mother is the culprit here; she is guilty not merely of being dominant but, like all mothers, of perpetuating the species in the first place. "Where is it written that life is so wonderful that we continually have to force it on others? Why, just because life has appeared on this planet, does it have to carry on?"

Yet the uncle does carry on, clinging to his panic attacks and wasted nights, to his

"freedom, paltry and inadequate as it is." His story concludes thus:

There are buildings, and neon signs flickering, this is a life, and it is here for the taking... You are alive... today, the sight of these extravagant, fleeting treasures has been granted to you and you alone, and no one can claim to be here in your place... This is the age of mediocrity. The more mediocre the times, the greater the disappointment. Lonely hearts beat silently, side by side, in suppressed or still unconscious rage. The explosion is imminent.

Mammals does not promise transformation but the promise of transformation: It cannot be so bold as to grant salvation, but it does admit the chance that one day, outside this novel, a little light may spill through the cracks of the uncle's moldering world. For while the disappointment, banality and petty everyday nastiness of human relationships create a fever pitch of tension, the tension cannot explode. The uncle's laziness, shallowness and cowardice, his willingness to settle for mediocrity, his ordinariness, and his excessive fondness for blue champagne and curaçao cocktails all undermine hope. But while in Houellebecq's world all promises have been broken and humans are left mucking about in the rubble, in Mérot the possibility of something better lies hidden in that very mediocrity, not in one's sexual urges but in the social fabric, where "neighbours slap you on the shoulder" and "café owners greet you." By any measure the uncle is a failure. And yet somehow not all is lost, for in the chorus of ordinary, lonely hearts beats the future.

Houellebecq's books are profoundly, defiantly lonely; his narrators yearn for contact but judge and condemn all of society out of hand, from behind the gates of their homes or the future's vista. Humans cannot come together, they always fail to connect—and always will, as long as their author's world is a morass of indistinguishable, interchangeable subconscious bodies punctured by one thinking man. *Mammals* is lonely, too, but it reaches out continually—the uncle's hand is slapped, but he doesn't give up. He has one small consolation, the knowledge that in this middling world "no one can claim to be here in your place." It is this uniqueness of each life, and Mérot's great talent for the quick character sketch, his masterful storytelling, that balance the abundance of sweeping claims and dismissals of the gross incompetents and morons whom

the uncle must tolerate and outwit.

Which isn't to say the sweeping claims aren't fun. Mérot knows how to play with generalities ("Even people who don't usually allow themselves to be caught up in social strife quickly wake up and become committed activists when it comes to hounding smokers") and how to casually invite readers into a joke ("The uncle's sex life is a disaster, though it has to be said, it got off to a bad start"). He effortlessly twists phrases to make them zing ("The big guns of Christianity tell us that God bestowed freedom on mankind. Boredom is one of

the chief freedoms which God bestowed on man") and leaps nimbly from vignette to vignette, pulling the reader along with him. *Mammals* understands how to be all serious and all joke, at one and the same time.

And so nothing can be sorrowful, only pathetic; even—especially—unhappiness is not in earnest. "You long for tenderness, but hatred, with its little cruelties, is not so bad." No, being at once self-absorbed and self-conscious, sincere and sarcastic, with your feet fast in the gutter and your eyes on the stars, is not so bad. It is not so bad at all. ■

Zones of Disengagement

RICHARD VINEN

ABSENT MINDS: Intellectuals in Britain. By Stefan Collini. Oxford. 526 pp. \$45.

Stanley Baldwin once said that "the difference between a man of intellect and an intellectual, was the same as the difference between a gentleman and a gent." His remarks were quoted approvingly by Margaret Thatcher soon after she became leader of the Conservative Party. Baldwin and Thatcher's words seem to sum up an important aspect of British history. Intellectuals are vulgar, fake, left-wing and, most important, un-English.

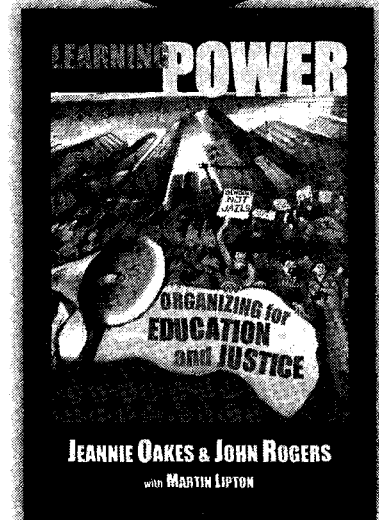
Those convinced that there are no English intellectuals point to philosophy. All French people study this discipline at school, and some of France's most prominent thinkers (including those, such as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who later attain fame for their work in other areas) study it up to the postgraduate level. Philosophy in France is taken to mean a concern with the big questions and with the ways in which previous writers have addressed them. Academic philosophers in England, by contrast, spend much of their time explaining the large number of broad questions to which philosophy cannot furnish answers. They are often concerned with narrow questions of language—it has been said that the whole of existentialism rested on a failure to define the verb "to be." French 18-year-olds write essays that are full of words such as "immanence"; English philosophy dons write books with titles such as *How to Do Things With Words*.

At second glance, things are, as ever, more complicated. The fact that many Eng-

lish people dislike the word "intellectual" does not mean that they dislike the thing—Margaret Thatcher did not like the words "bourgeois" or "privatization" either. Besides, there have obviously been English intellectuals, and some of them are drawn from the very circles—Conservative and upper-class—that are normally assumed to be most immune to the sins of "intellectualism." The Third Marquis of Salisbury (who was prime minister for thirteen years) was an intellectual by any definition: He wrote articles for the *Quarterly Review*, and the leading journal of the British intellectual right during the 1980s was named the *Salisbury Review* in his honor. Salisbury's nephew Balfour wrote "A Defence of Philosophic Doubt" in his spare time while being a Conservative minister. Baldwin himself played the bluff English squire but spent much of his time in Aix-les-Bains; he claimed to be uninterested in general ideas but published his essays in a book with the sweeping title of *On England and Other Addresses*. He was much influenced by his cousin Rudyard Kipling, who was described by Julien Benda as the archetypal English nationalist *clerc*. The novels of Anthony Powell and the cartoons of Osbert Lancaster often revolve around the curiously blurred frontiers between Belgravia and Bohemia—a frontier inhabited by men with clipped accents and regimental ties who turn out to be interested in the novels of Virginia Woolf or the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard.

Richard Vinen teaches European history at King's College in London. His latest book is *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Little, Brown).

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**Oil Addiction,
the World in Peril**

Stefan Collini encapsulates some of the paradoxes that dominate discussion of English intellectuals. In spite of his exotic name (it is interesting to speculate on how his work would be received if he were called "Steve Collins"), Collini is an English professor of English literature at an English university. He is also well versed in Continental academic life, particularly that of France. By his own definition (of which more below), he is an intellectual, but he also has a skepticism and a distrust of grand theory that some might see as quintessentially English. Perhaps for this reason, he has mainly communicated his ideas, so far, in essays and extended book reviews. This book seeks to bring his arguments together.

Collini begins with definition. He is not concerned with intellectuals in the "sociological sense" (meaning those who follow particular professions) nor with intellectuals in the "subjective sense" (meaning people who think). Rather—sailing between the Snowvian Scylla of statistical analysis and the Leaviste Charybdis of value judgments about the intrinsic quality of people's writing—Collini wants to look at intellectuals in the "cultural sense." By this, he means that an intellectual is characterized by an authority that has been established through "creative, analytical or scholarly" work, by access to means of communication that take intellectuals' views to a wider public than that reached by his or her initial work, and by the fact that his or her views intersect with matters of wider general interest. To sum it up crudely, intellectuals for Collini always have some public dimension. The phrase "public intellectual" originated in the United States, but the real innovation of American life is the "private intellectual"—that is, one who addresses general issues but does so in such obscure publications, and in such opaque language, that he or she can only reach his or her own colleagues on the faculty at Duke or Yale.

Collini's definition of an intellectual can be illustrated with a brief look at the two leading English literary periodicals. The *Times Literary Supplement* is not an intellectual publication (though intellectuals sometimes write for it). Its reviews are brief, rarely more than 2,000 words. Reviewers are expected to keep their egos in check (until quite recently reviews were published anonymously). The *London Review of Books* is an intellectual publication. The names of reviewers are important (more so than authors of the books under review). Reviews are long (never fewer than 2,500 words) and writers are encouraged to expand on their own views. A quintessential *LRB* piece was by David Runciman. Ostensibly reviewing a book on game theory, Runciman embarked on a rather confusing point about jelly beans before getting on to his favorite hobbyhorse (denouncing Tony Blair), which he then rode for the rest of the piece. The quintessential *TLS* review of recent years, by contrast, was about punctuation in successive editions of Jane Austen's novels.

Collini proceeds to take on some commonly held assumptions. First, he tries to show that there are, and always have been, intellectuals in Britain. He argues that the much-vaunted peculiarities of England often revolve around a misleading comparison with France: England seems more normal if it is compared with, say, Denmark or Belgium or the United States, where intellectuals in the early twentieth century were sometimes seen to be imitating British models. He also argues that the "other" with reference to which intellectuals are often discussed is sometimes chronological rather than geographical. This means that people often talk as though there was once a golden age of the intellectual, which has been destroyed by the impossibility of tackling broad themes in an age of extreme specialization. The idea that there was a golden age of generalists who could range over the whole cultural field is unlikely to win over anyone whose professional duties have ever required sitting next to elderly classics dons at dinner. Furthermore, it might be argued that relatively recent academic disciplines—sociology, cultural studies and queer theory—have actually encouraged their practitioners to operate across a very wide range. In any case, definitions of what an intellectual might be expected to know have changed. When Aldous Huxley was at school, in the early twentieth century, education meant primarily the ability to put chunks of Milton into Latin and Greek. Around the time of World War I, classics declined—Huxley was one of the first important Englishmen to study English literature at university. By the late 1920s (according to Evelyn Waugh), the books of Huxley himself were expected to feature on the bookshelves of any intellectual Oxford undergraduate. Now no one at a fashionable London party would be expected to have read *Eyeless in Gaza*, but everyone would be expected to know that Jim Morrison named his band after Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*.

The latter part of Collini's book is mainly made up of a series of case studies focusing on particular individuals—T.S. Eliot, R.G. Collingwood, A.J.P. Taylor, George Orwell and A.J. Ayer. These studies do not quite live up to the promise

held out in the early part of the book. For all of Collini's insistence that he wishes to produce a sustained argument rather than a collection of essays, these chapters often have the feel of extended book reviews. There is a snuffy tone in some of them. Cambridge historians talk of the old-fashioned "great books" school of intellectual history. Sometimes one feels that Collini is a master of the "mediocre books" school and that his subjects have been chosen so that he can draw attention to the naïveté or contradictions inherent in their approach—though I assume that his concluding sentence on Orwell, which recognizes that some fault or other "was, of course, partially offset by other, less culpable strains," contains an element of self-mockery.

Some obvious themes are given little attention. Several times Collini draws attention to the fact that writers under discussion assume that the intellectual is a "he," but Collini himself looks mainly at men and says little about differences between the sexes. He mentions Virginia Woolf several times but says nothing about how she was excluded from the institutions that educated her husband and brother (a matter she certainly regarded as important). Were there more female intellectuals at the end of the twentieth century than at its beginning and, if so, is this important? Would it be fair to say feminism provides one of the key links between specialized academic work and discussions of "general" matters? Is it significant that feminist intellectuals are still so often discussed in terms of their relations with men and, if so, is it significant that France's most famous feminist (Simone de Beauvoir) is known for her relations with Sartre, Claude Lanzmann and Nelson Algren while England's most famous feminist (Germaine Greer) is known mainly for her alleged relations with various members of the Manchester United soccer team?

Whole areas are left out. Surely economics is the single discipline that does most to address issues of general concern to the public—certainly economists are the academic specialists who are most likely to write in newspapers. Peter Jay was once widely regarded as "the cleverest man in England"; Ayer fussed over what the undergraduate Jay might have thought of his lectures. Wynne Godley was an influential figure in both the Treasury and at Cambridge University, as well as being a contributor on matters such as psychoanalysis to *The London Review of Books*. Both men were closely linked to other parts of the cultural or political establishment—Godley's father-in-law was the sculptor Jacob Epstein; Jay's father-in-law was, for a time, prime minister. Neither man is mentioned

by Collini. There is no sense of why English economists have been better at reaching the general public than their French colleagues—a group of students at the École Normale Supérieure recently complained of their discipline's "autism"—or worse than their American colleagues, who produce all those snappy articles about "Why drug dealers live with their mothers."

In some ways, Collini's greatest strength—his grasp of debates in France—illustrates his weaknesses. He is steeped in the work on the history of French intellectuals done by Jean-François Sirinelli, Pascal Ory and Christophe Charle. However, for all the talk of France as a land of abstraction and grand theory, the French approach to the history of intellectuals is marked by detailed empirical work and number-crunching. This produces a great deal of useful information. It is, for example, important to know that a third of all students preparing for entrance to the École Normale in the interwar period were the sons of teachers—not least because it shows that Sartre and Raymond Aron, two of four men in their year who did not need scholarships, were richer than most of their classmates.

Collini does not try to match this statistical base, and the tantalizingly rare numbers he does drop into his argument—that, for example, there were 200 university teachers of philosophy in Britain during the 1950s, and that fifty of them taught at Oxford—make one feel that it would be helpful if he could. Sometimes Collini uses numbers in a misleading way. He talks of university expansion and how this changes the public to which intellectuals address themselves. But he says little about national differences here. The expansion of Continental universities (though not the grandest of French *grandes écoles*) was most spectacular during the 1960s; British universities expanded most sharply in the very different ideological climate of the 1980s and '90s.

A second peculiarity that is exposed by Collini's reference to French writers is the relative attention accorded to educational institutions. In France the École Normale Supérieure is very specifically associated with notions of the intelligentsia—the Dreyfusard campaign more or less started in the library of the ENS, and one of France's most prominent intellectuals, the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, actually lived in the school for almost all his adult life. Even more important than the ENS itself are the *khâgneux* (particularly at the elite Paris *lycées*), which prepare students for entry to the ENS. Even people who did not go to the ENS (Pierre Nora, Philippe Ariès,

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Roland Barthes) were heavily marked by the years they spent preparing for its entrance examination. Jacques Derrida began his obituary of Bourdieu by recalling how the two men met in *hypokhâgne* at Louis-le-Grand. Régis Debray's recent writings on the death of the intellectual contain touching recollections of his own time at Jeanson-de-Sailly. French work on intellectuals has a very strong institutional focus—Sirinelli's *these d'état* was about *normaliens* and *khâgneux* between the wars.

The English education system is less centralized and less explicitly elitist than the French one. Nonetheless, some institutions clearly play a larger role than others. When Collini refers to "Cambridge," he usually means just two of the university's thirty-one colleges (Trinity and King's). Trinity was the college of Lytton Strachey, Trevelyan, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Piero Sraffa. Its fellowship (about the size of the faculty at a very small liberal arts college) have won nearly as many Nobel Prizes as France.

Of course, it might be argued that the real feature of elite education in England was its anti-intellectualism. Public schools (by which the English mean expensive private schools) are often seen to be characterized by their disdain. Cyril Connolly wrote bitterly that Eton had taught him to hide his cleverness "as a good tailor hides a hump." Later Connolly was said to have been hurt when he overheard his fellow Etonian Alfred Ayer quoting Virginia Woolf: "I do not like that smarty boots Connolly." Of course, both of these remarks should be taken with a pinch of salt. If Eton aimed to teach either Ayer or Connolly to hide his cleverness, then it was singularly unsuccessful. In fact, Eton's role in the formation of the British intelligentsia is at least as important as that of Henri IV or Louis-le-Grand in forming the French intelligentsia. Aldous Huxley was a pupil and then a teacher at Eton; Keynes was an Etonian and, even in the middle of World War II, found time to act as a fellow of the school. Orwell was a contemporary of Connolly; the historian and *New Left Review* editor Perry Anderson must have been pretty much a contemporary of the sociologist Gary Runciman there—though Anderson, a great one for drawing attention to the *normalien* mafia in French intellectual life, did not mention this when he reviewed Runciman's book on forms of privilege and power.

Eton's role has become more important during the twentieth century. It has eclipsed both Harrow, which once enjoyed an almost equal degree of social prestige, and Winchester, which is more academically rigorous. This is linked partly to the

school's peculiar nature. Most of its pupils are very rich. However, the school also has a number of scholarship boys concentrated in "College." Scholarship boys are rarely very poor—most seem to be drawn from what Orwell, referring to himself, described as the "lower upper middle class." However, the mingling of what Péguy referred to as *héritiers* and *boursiers* allows both to trade on a complicated mixture of social and cultural capital. Eton offers its pupils three particular advantages. First, the school imbues its students with the confidence to believe they can engage with big ideas—no one would suggest that Alec Douglas Home, who was a contemporary of Orwell and Connolly at Eton, was an intellectual, but it is illustrative of Etonian intellectual confidence that he is the only British prime minister ever to have read *Das Kapital*. Second, Etonians are imbued with the confidence that other people will be interested in their opinions. Third, Etonians have a network of contacts and advantages that smoothes entry into the *New Left Review* as easily as it smoothes entry into N.M. Rothschild.

Being an intellectual, Collini concludes by tying his academic expertise to some broad general statements. He urges his readers (composed in large part, one assumes, of British intellectuals) to accept that intellectuals have always been part of British national life. He is relatively optimistic about the current state of British intellectual life—pointing out that the *LRB* today reaches more readers than the *Tribune* and *Horizon* put together did when Orwell wrote for them. He advances some slightly worthy views on the virtues of long radio talks and articles in literary periodicals, along with stern warnings about the enemies of promise that lurk behind each invitation to write an 800-word book review. However, he is sometimes so keen to show that Britain is not unique in lacking an intelligentsia that he understates the ways in which the intelligentsia it does have differs from that of other countries. He is particularly prone to understate its more disagreeable features. There is a coziness and complacency about the British intellectual world. This is partly a matter of social background. The leading intellectuals are drawn together by common education and by mutual acquaintance. Apart from those (often the most left-wing) who have been tempted to well-endowed chairs in the United States, the majority of British intellectuals live and work within walking distance of King's Parade or Russell Square.

There is, however, more to it than that. In purely social terms, the French intelli-

gentsia is more close-knit than the British one—the intellectual history of France is really the history of two Paris *arrondissements*. What makes France different from Britain is politics. The sharp political divisions of twentieth-century France meant that even old *camarades de classe* such as Sartre and Aron ended up criticizing each other. More important, French intellectuals take themselves seriously enough to regard their own mistakes as being significant. Ex-Communists such as Edgar Morin, ex-Maoists such as Olivier Rolin and ex-Maurassians such as Raoul Girardet have written with great insight about their own youthful errors. You find little of this in England. British intellectuals have often changed their mind. Many of them changed

their views on Soviet Communism after 1956. Many of them moved from Marxism to support for the attempt to launch a Social Democratic Party during the early 1980s. Many of them supported Tony Blair in 1997 and condemned him after 2003. All of these about-turns have been accompanied by much pontification on the faults of British politicians and sometimes by barely disguised disdain for the population that elected those politicians. Yet almost none of these about-turns have been accompanied by much sense that the intelligentsia itself might be at fault. One is reminded of the joke that they used to tell in the French Communist Party in the 1950s: “X has written his self-critique.” “Oh, good. Against whom?” ■

Woman Warrior

REZA ASLAN

IRAN AWAKENING: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope.

By Shirin Ebadi with Azadeh Moaveni. Random House. 232 pp. \$24.95.

Iranian human rights lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi is one of the most eloquent advocates for liberalism and reform in the Muslim world. Her tireless work on behalf of those left unprotected by Iran's draconian laws—the orphaned, the widowed, the dispossessed—has made her an almost

saintly figure in Iran. Her recently published memoir, *Iran Awakening*, is an inspiring account of her herculean struggle to hold Iran's clerical regime accountable for its gross human rights violations. As a testament to how a single, inspired voice can rise above the cacophony of bigotry and fanaticism, the book should be required reading for any American trying to see through the fog of misinformation about how to bring freedom to Iran.

But had the US government had its way, no American ever would have read it.

Until recently an outmoded and discriminatory Treasury Department regulation, enforced by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), prohibited the translation, editing, promotion or marketing of any work from an embargoed state (e.g., Iran, Cuba, Sudan) unless the work had been previously published in the writer's home country. Ebadi's memoir, of course, never would have passed Iran's unyielding censors and thus had no chance of being published first in her home country. It was

precisely for that reason that Ebadi turned to the United States, assuming that a country that has sanctified freedom of speech would provide her the opportunity denied by Iran's hard-line government to publish the story of her life and work.

To her astonishment, OFAC banned the publication of her memoir here, in effect censoring a liberal Muslim reformer who has spent her life battling the very Islamic extremists that the United States is so keen to defeat. OFAC eventually suggested that she apply for a license that would allow her to publish her memoir here without facing any penalties. But rather than accept the compromise, Ebadi and her American agent initiated a lawsuit against the Treasury Department in federal court, claiming that the OFAC law was unconstitutional. Embarrassed by the media attention, the department backed down. On December 15, 2004, OFAC revised its laws regulating so-called “embargoed literature,” clearing the way for the publication of *Iran Awakening*.

If you find it remarkable that a female human rights lawyer from Iran should have the audacity to remind the US government of its constitutional responsibilities, then you don't know Shirin Ebadi.

Reza Aslan, a scholar of religions, is the author of *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (Random House), recently published in paperback.



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Born in 1947, Ebadi grew up in an era of profound social and political change. The country's young monarch, Muhammad Reza Shah, only recently placed on the throne by the victors of World War II, had launched a forced modernization/Westernization program that dramatically reformed Iran's archaic family law. For the first time, women were allowed an active role in shaping domestic policy. The universities were flooded with bright, ambitious girls studying law, engineering and medicine. But equal access to education did not translate into equal status in society. Despite the Shah's reforms, the patriarchal codes that underlay Iran's social order were still firmly in place. A woman could go to college. She could even serve in the government. But she could not expect to transcend the traditional limitations placed on her by Iran's rigid, male-dominated society.

It was Ebadi's great fortune to have grown up somewhat sheltered from the experience of most women of her time. Reared in a wealthy and unconventional family, Ebadi never suffered the "low self-esteem and learned dependence" she observed in women from more traditional homes. Her father, a former agricultural minister in the Shah's government, always encouraged her to be a strong and independent woman. After college she married a kind and almost comically unpatriarchal husband who, by her account, deferred to her wisdom and strength in nearly every situation. At the age of 23 she became a judge whose authority over the men who entered her courtroom was accepted as a matter of course. All of this may explain why, even as she enthusiastically took part in the movement to topple the Shah's government, it never occurred to her what effect the revolution would have on the status of women in Iran.

As one of the country's most distinguished female judges, Ebadi and her pro-revolutionary sentiments were especially welcomed by the opposition forces helmed by the charismatic cleric Ayatollah Khomeini. Like many middle-class intellectuals, Ebadi had no problem reconciling her secularist outlook with Khomeini's religious rhetoric. After all, she writes, "Who did I have more in common with, in the end: an opposition led by mullahs who spoke in the tones familiar to ordinary Iranians or the gilded court of the shah, whose officials cavorted with American starlets at parties soaked in expensive French champagne?"

Before long, however, Ebadi realized she had "willingly and enthusiastically participated in [her] own demise." Almost immediately there were signs that the revolution, whose primary purpose was to free Iranians from the bonds of autocracy, was

veering off course. First, there was the "headscarf 'invitation'" announcing that women should reflect their fidelity to the revolution by covering their hair (Ebadi, who had never worn the veil before, took to tacking one in the hallway so as to remember to put it on before leaving the house). Men in her office no longer came to work in suits and ties but in stained, collarless shirts and badly wrinkled slacks meant to identify them with the humble masses. Rumors swirled around the courtroom that Islam barred women from serving as judges. Issues once central to the revolution, such as the redistribution of wealth and the opening up of Iranian society, were replaced by the most inane and purely theatrical concerns—the length of a woman's hem or the fullness of a man's beard.

Iran's judiciary quickly became the chief obstacle to the imposition of Islamic law. The clerics were themselves jurists, and the new Iran they envisioned was founded on the belief that only they could properly judge what was lawful and what was not. One day Ebadi arrived at work to find that she no longer had a job: The judiciary had been purged and brought under the dominion of the mosque. Less than two years after helping to tear down the monarchy, Ebadi had been demoted to little more than a clerk in the court she once presided over. In protest, she continued to show up at her office every morning but refused to do any work. She simply sat at her desk and stared at the wall.

By the time she and most of her colleagues realized that the revolution had been hijacked, Saddam Hussein had launched a surprise attack on Iran. Suddenly, the debate over the meaning and purpose of the revolution came to a halt. The provisional government was sacked and unconditional power handed over to Khomeini and his personal militia, the Revolutionary Guards. Ebadi could do nothing but watch her dreams of democracy transform into the nightmare of religious authoritarianism. "If we admitted to ourselves that the revolution had been betrayed," she writes of the dilemma facing many Iranians, "we would surely lose the war."

Ebadi's words are a timely reminder, particularly as the United States contemplates another pre-emptive military attack in the region, that the history of revolution and war in Iran is intertwined. It was the war with Iraq that ultimately created the Islamic Republic as we know it, not the revolution itself. It was the war that brought all of Iran, including the military, under the yoke of clerical rule, allowing Khomeini to make sweeping changes in the Constitution

in the name of national security (a tactic with which Americans have become familiar under the Bush Administration). More than anything else, it was the war that convinced even the most pro-American Iranians that the United States could never be trusted. As Ebadi writes:

Imagine if you were an Iranian and watched the boys in your neighborhood board the bus for the front, never to return. Imagine staring in mute horror at the television screen as Saddam rained chemical weapons down on your boys, his death planes guided by U.S. satellite photos. Fast forward about fifteen years. Now you are watching faded video footage of Donald Rumsfeld shaking Saddam Hussein's hand, smiling at the butcher who made our capital's cemetery a city. Now you are listening to President George W. Bush promise he wants to bring democracy to the Middle East. You are hearing him address the Iranian people in his State of the Union address, telling them that if they stand for their own liberty, America will stand with them. Do you believe him?

When the Iran-Iraq war stuttered to a truce eight years later, more than a million people on both sides had died. An entire generation of Iranian men had been obliterated, creating a vacuum in the workforce that could only be filled by the country's highly educated and capable women. Those who had lost their jobs in the postrevolutionary purges were invited back to work. Ebadi returned to her courtroom, this time as a lawyer (she remained barred from serving as a judge), where she has spent the past decade challenging the Iranian government as much in the court of public opinion as in the court of law.

Iran Awakening chronicles many of the cases that Ebadi has fought in Iran's inequitable courts, including, most dramatically, the infamous serial murders of a group of Iranian dissidents and writers in the winter of 1998, a case that ultimately resulted in the unprecedented arrest and conviction of members of the government's own Information Ministry (while working on the case, Ebadi learned that she was the next person the ministry had marked for death). Of course, Ebadi lost nearly every one of these cases, but in a rigged legal system like Iran's, winning or losing is beside the point. What matters is the light she has shone on a system that can function only if it remains in the shadows.

Ebadi's genius as a human rights lawyer comes from her ability to exploit the founding mythology of the Iranian revo-

LETTERS

CONTINUED

lution, namely that it was fought on behalf of the dispossessed. Her objective is to show Iranians that "the dispossessed [have] now become the dispossessors." By publicly unveiling the injustices suffered by the weakest members of society at the hands of a regime that likes to present itself as the champion of the weak, Ebadi seeks to shame the Iranian government into changing (much as she shamed the Treasury Department). In this way, she uses the same Islamic ideals that supposedly underpin the Islamic Republic as a weapon against the barbarisms of the clerical regime. It is a risky strategy that has repeatedly put her life in peril. But in a country like Iran, it is not enough to whisper that the emperor has no clothes; it must be shouted so that all the world becomes aware of his nakedness.

While such fearlessness has made Ebadi a hero to many Iranians, not everyone agrees with her approach. Indeed, Ebadi has her fair share of critics, particularly among influential Iranian-Americans who favor a more aggressive policy toward Iran. In the wake of the recent presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the consolidation of the conservatives' control over every level of government, some Iranians believe that the days when the clerical system could be reformed from within have come and gone. For them, the only option left is to destroy the regime by any means necessary and build a new Iran on its ashes.

Meanwhile, recent reports in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere that the United States is preparing a sustained bombing campaign in Iran in hopes of halting the country's nuclear program, coupled with revelations that the Pentagon has been using an Iranian terrorist organization called the Mujahedine Khalq (MEK) to conduct stealth operations in Iran from bases in Iraq and Pakistan, have pushed the already paranoid clerical regime into a panic. As happened during the Iran-Iraq war, the regime has begun clamping down even harder on dissent so that activists like Ebadi who seek a compromise on the nuclear impasse and détente with the West are increasingly being denounced as US stooges.

Still, Ebadi remains convinced that change in Iran can only come from within. "The Iranian Revolution," she writes, "has produced its own opposition, not least a nation of educated, conscious women who are agitating for their rights. They must be given the chance to fight their own fights, to transform their country uninterrupted." Whether Iranians like Ebadi get that chance depends in large part on US policy. ■

(Continued From Page 2)

documenting nondecision means that those responsible for it were unaware of the consequences of not deciding. What is more important: what people said they intended to do (or not do) or the foreseeable consequences of their decisions (or indecisions)? The history of Israel is strewn with proclamations of good intentions toward its Arab neighbors. Some were outright lies, some were diplomatic obfuscations, and a few were sincere.

Gorenberg acknowledges that "indecision worked for the territorial maximalists." Are we supposed to believe that no one in Israel's political elite from 1967 to '77 was aware of this? I don't deny that people's opinions changed over time. But I do emphasize the secular tendency of the growth in the influence of annexationists and hard-liners from 1948 to the present.

This is perhaps my most important difference with Gorenberg—the evaluation of the period from 1949 to '67. And it is not a matter of ideological proclivity, as he says. If it were, how could I find myself in substantial agreement with Shlomo Ben-Ami? Ben-Ami insistently proclaims, in *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Arab Israeli Tragedy*, which I reviewed along with Gorenberg's book, that he is a Zionist. And how could Ben-Ami and I find much in common with Tom Segev (whose book I mentioned in the review), who probably can be classified as a post-Zionist (I leave it to *The New Republic* to determine whether "hard" or "soft")? How one sees the period from 1967 to '77 depends critically on what kind of place one judges Israel to have been before 1967. This is not a matter of ideology but of empirical research. By now enough has been done to support the claim that there was never a "beautiful Israel" free of the settler-colonial impulse that established the state.

JOEL BEININ

'PLATITUDINOUS MISUNDERSTANDINGS'

Chicago

■ Richard Wolin makes some extraordinary claims in "Heidegger Made Kosher" [Feb. 20]. Some are simply platitudes: for instance, that structuralist thought makes political action impossible, or that Heidegger's writings must somehow be infected because he was a Nazi. The first was discussed by Alain Badiou in his "Ethics," in which he points out that those who wish for a "return to man" don't actually do anything, except perhaps take part in the French government, while those who rejected the concept of man in the first place—Foucault, Althusser, Lacan—were engaged to the fullest extent. The second should not require any response: French Heideggerians are overwhelmingly leftists or liberals.

More worrying, however, are Wolin's platitudinous misunderstandings of the thinkers he discusses. It is simple enough to take Heidegger at his word. But his rejection of humanism is hardly the effacement of man from the sands

of time. No matter how much someone might want to trace structuralism to Heidegger to show that it's Nazified, the fact remains that the human is greatly privileged by the said Nazi, as, most famously, the shepherd of Being. This isn't the extremist Sartrean humanism, of the "all that matters is me" variety. But neither is it the complete antihumanism that some would like to make out.

Wolin fails to understand Levinas's thought. This is attributable to Wolin's reading of Heidegger. If we take Heidegger to be a rigorous antihumanist, it is easy to say Levinas must be. But in fact Levinas starts from the self, albeit with a focus on the Other. It is only *my* experience of the Face of the Other (which *only* happens in the "encounter" with other *people*) that lets us experience infinity. Like Heidegger, Levinas is always bringing the human being back in as the primary unit of analysis. It is clear enough that if these claims are taken on board, a different family tree of philosophy can be traced.

The French thinkers who take up the true critique of liberal individualism—the early Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Badiou—all reject the simplistic view that philosophy, to be acceptable, must be made consistent with traditional individual political action. For this view leads to the polling booth and the editorial pages of newspapers. On the contrary, the antihumanist view leads to the possibility of rigorous, holistic thinking and thus to the defense of the environment; a critique of capitalism *as system* (not as embodied by Starbucks); and a rejection of liberal individualist "humanism," which is otherwise completely victorious. Levinas and Sartre are, in fact, on the same side of the fence: postphenomenological individualism. Sartrean "humanism" gives us the view that "hell is other people." Why on earth would anyone want to hold to such a philosophy? And how could it lead to political action?

JUSTIN EVANS

WOLIN REPLIES

New York City

■ Justin Evans's letter exudes the intellectual befuddlement typical of someone who has adopted the pieties of "French Theory" as a privileged metaphysical belief system. Regrettably, the reality principle is nowhere in sight. Still, let me take his points in order. France had a nominally Socialist government from 1981 to 1995 and again from 1997 to 2002. The Socialists eliminated the death penalty, implemented a thirty-five-hour workweek and have fought vigorously to achieve sexual parity. To suggest, as Evans does, that writing unintelligible books is superior to political activism ("those who wish for a 'return to man' don't actually do anything, except perhaps take part in the French government") is ludicrous.

The contention that Heidegger's thought is morally and politically "unserviceable" has less to do with his having been a Nazi than his having failed to learn from the experience, to

wit: Heidegger's later conclusion that human action is ultimately fruitless and that "only a god can save us." In support of his claim that Heidegger's later philosophy is not entirely "misanthropic," or hostile to "man," Evans invokes Heidegger's image of man as the "shepherd of Being"—a perfect illustration of the antihumanist standpoint. The problem is that, for Heidegger, "man" is always the neighbor of "Being," never of his fellow men and women.

That someone can read Heidegger and then become politically engaged is a point I happily concede. But by steering clear of political reality, Evans makes things too easy for himself. Let's take the case of the May '68 revolt, where the entire structuralist generation—Foucault, Althusser, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes and Philippe Sollers—was "absent without leave." All had declared that "events" were impossible. Hence, they were, to a man, "no shows." Conversely, in retrospect May '68 is widely viewed as a vindication of Sartre's notion of human freedom: our capacity, under the most oppressive conditions, to leave a constructive, human imprint on existing circumstances. It was no coincidence that Sartre was the only French intellectual the striking students allowed to address their plenary assembly at the Sorbonne on May 20. As student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit affirmed, "None of us had read Marcuse. Some had read Marx...maybe Bakunin.... [But] the political militants of the March 22 [Movement] had all read Sartre." If Sartre still believed that "hell is other people," it certainly didn't prevent him from becoming the consummate embodiment of the engaged intellectual.

Last, if Evans holds "the editorial pages of newspapers" in such low esteem, why then bother to write such a confused and dyspeptic letter?

RICHARD WOLIN

EUBIE: TOO OLD FOR WAR

Ann Arbor, Mich.

■ In David Levering Lewis's review of Richard Slotkin's *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* ["The Race to War," Feb. 20], Eubie Blake is mentioned as being part of World War I's legendary 369th Battalion, peopled by black stars like Bill Robinson, James Reese Europe and Noble Sissle. Actually, Eubie tried to enlist but was refused on grounds of age—he was too old to fight in World War I, about which he often expressed regret. That war did not prevent Sissle, Blake and Europe from collaborating on several songs, including "On Patrol in No Man's Land." The threesome's great plans of collaborating on Broadway after the war were thwarted by Europe's murder in 1919. Eubie and Noble would, however, go on to take Broadway by storm in 1921's epoch-making *Shuffle Along*.

WILLIAM BOLCOM

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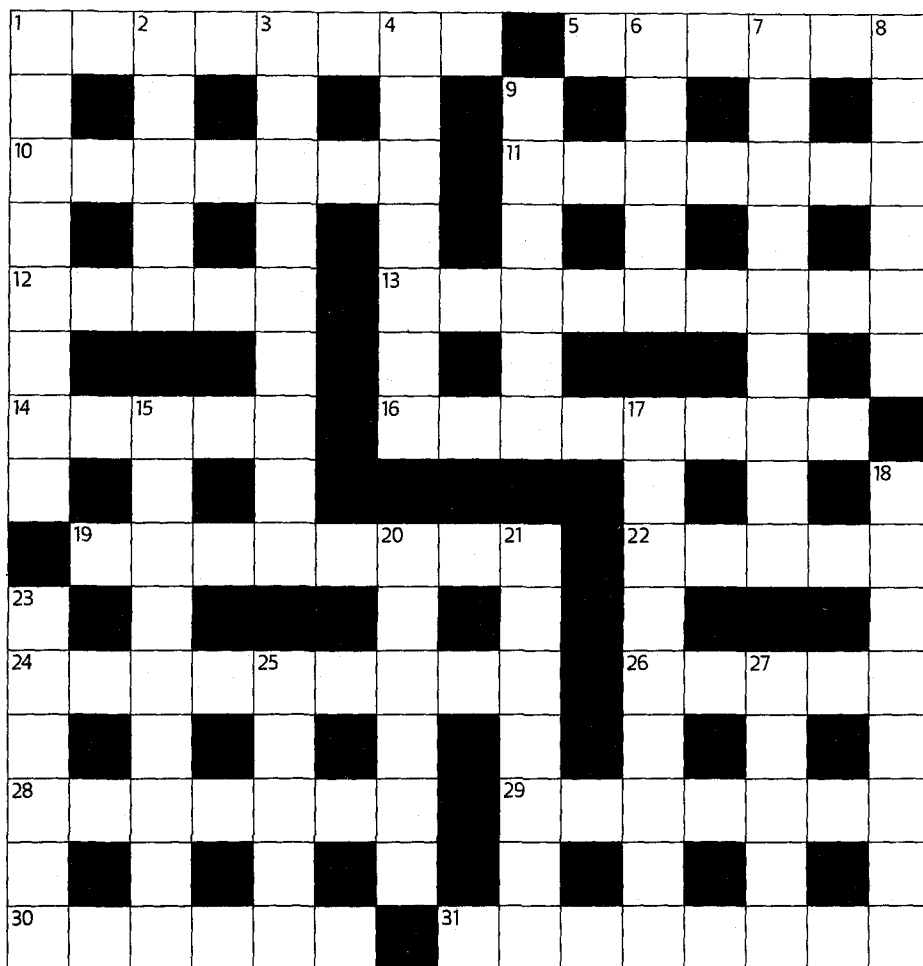
FRANK W. LEWIS

ACROSS

- 1 and 5 Acts like an angel or a 3 down to take in a golf club, for example—one who likes to show you the way. (4-4,6)
- 10 Possibly a farmer in the fall, if one comes with a good mark to this. (7)
- 11 Bill might be sent on this story. (7)
- 12 Nacre does to show it, as one might believe. (5)
- 13 Speaks to the point of going to the dance for teenagers of a bygone era, but can't get away from the office procedures. (5,4)
- 14 A point can't possibly show what the lawmaker might do. (5)
- 16 A Knight of the Bath, one hears in common parlance. (8)
- 19 Put them in the washer at the laundromat—they might be close! (8)
- 22 The opposite of "Haw!" to a point, with such as a famous Mother. (5)
- 24 You probably hear it when the horn's blowing, or the car's wrecked! (9)
- 26 Only rich people see such a nice quality of sound in it. (5)
- 28 Possibly something that fouls up the works, made out of elm, with a happy expression about it. (7)
- 29 Seems like little Katherine acted like one, but only the masculine type have a song to sing. (7)
- 30 Possibly reeks, to a point, like serpentine ridges of drift. (6)
- 31 Sort of love to go to town—and at such rate of speed! (8)

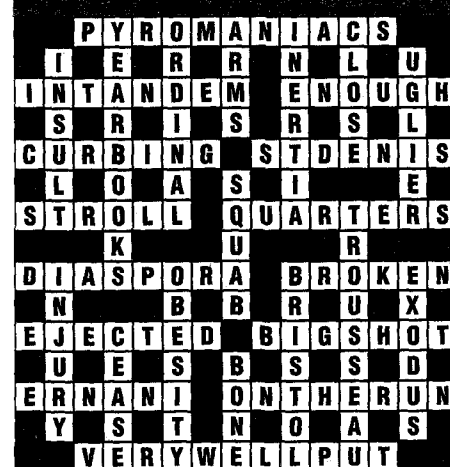
DOWN

- 1 Such things were built for two, according to the oldie. (8)
- 2 A large number, all by itself, makes an exact copy. (5)
- 3 Something that might hold you up, especially if you dine on heavy ale. (9)
- 4 Lets the air in, with Easter a possible showing of it. (7)
- 6 Bridge players like them, with overt beginnings—stacks of them! (5)
- 7 To speak for someone (not out) is to show a certain amount of condescension. (9)



- 8 Concerning one kind, you have to press the keys all over again to do it. (6)
- 9 Everything is in rather moist surroundings, but it might still go into your pocket. (6)
- 15 Sir Andrew of fiction, causing some chills and showing a lot of nerve! (9)
- 17 Opera takes a bit of equipment, with nothing to allow the end to bring it up. (9)
- 18 Eat badly with one who gets stuck holding the bag—the British particularly use it. (3,5)
- 20 Stretch out the text ending to show it. (6)
- 21 She shows a sort of lack of something that might pin you down. (7)
- 23 Part of the shoe should speak for itself—in any language. (6)
- 25 One might catch those little wiggly things! (5)
- 27 Spoke in the plural form. (5)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

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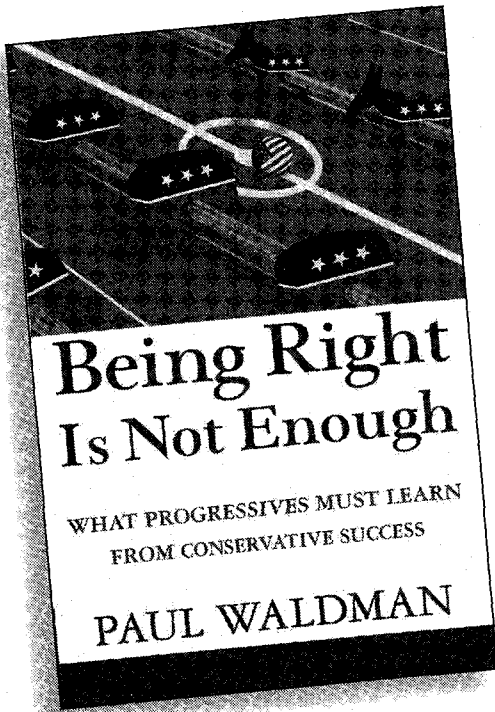
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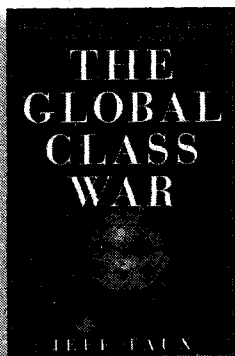
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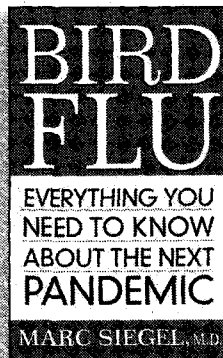
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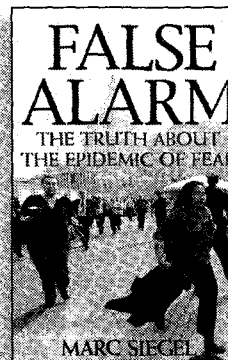
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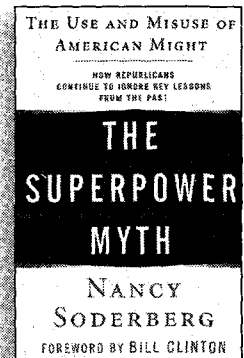
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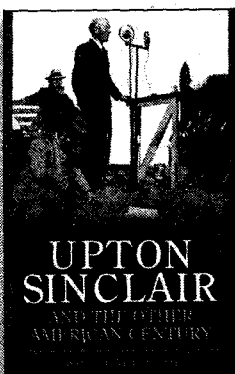
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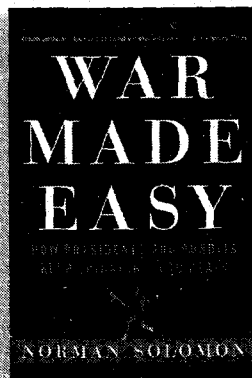
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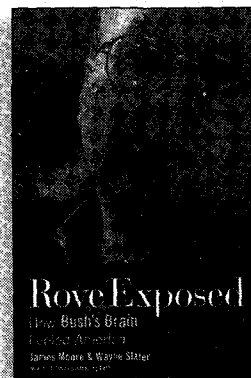
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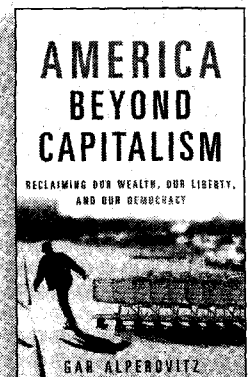
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